

Exploring the role of special needs assistants on the inclusion of students with special educational needs in mainstream post-primary physical education.

A thesis for the degree of

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by

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Declaration

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of Doctor of Philosophy is entirely my own work, that I have exercised reasonable care to ensure that the work is original, and does not to the best of my knowledge breach any law of copyright, and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

Signed: _____

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my Grandad, Tom Tynan (1925-2014).

You encouraged me to continue in education by advising that my Degree was

“Not a full stop, just a comma”

Although you may not have been here to see me complete this PhD, I have felt your presence more than ever over the final months of completing it and I hope you will be proud to watch over me as I wear the “hat” on graduation day that you always said would suit me!

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List of Acronyms

ADHD	Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder
DES	Department of Education and Skills
EBD	Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties
EPSEN	Education for Persons with a Special Educational Need
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NCSE	National Council for Special Education
PE	Physical Education
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SENO	Special Educational Needs Organiser
SNA	Special Needs Assistant
SSLD	Specific Speech and Language Disorder
SLD	Specific Learning Disability

Abstract

Exploring the role of special needs assistants on the inclusion of students with special educational needs in mainstream post-primary physical education.

Elaine Banville

Introduction

The use of Special Needs Assistants (SNA) is the primary system of support used in Ireland for the successful inclusion of children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) in mainstream schools (Department of Education and Skills 2011). Research has frequently suggested that physical education (PE) teachers have concerns with facilitating the inclusion of students with SEN (Sweeney and Coulter 2008). This research explores the current and desired role of SNAs in PE in mainstream post-primary school.

Methods

This study employed a mixed methods approach using questionnaires (n=523), and focus groups and interviews (n=11).

Results and Discussion

As has been found in existing research there were major discrepancies between the prescribed circular role of the SNA and the duties they were fulfilling in schools, with duties of a teaching nature being very prevalent. The role of SNAs in PE was found to be predominantly an active one, with both PE teachers and SNAs perceiving the role to be important and expressing a desire for SNAs to be increasingly active in PE. The individual nature of SEN had a statistically significant impact on the roles fulfilled by SNAs in PE, and in general education, along with students' inclusion in PE. Other factors found to significantly impact on the role of the SNA were the people responsible for delegating duties and the years of working experience and gender of the SNA and PE teacher. The implementation and communication of the PE curriculum was highlighted as impacting on the inclusion of students with SEN in PE and also on the SNAs role in PE. Finally it was ascertained that SNAs were not adequately trained to be fulfilling many of the duties which they currently were in PE and in general education and desired more training opportunities.

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The growing inclusion agenda within Ireland's education policy has seen an increase in students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) attending mainstream schools (Meegan 2006a; Rose and Shevlin 2004), with numbers standing at 17,512 at the last count in 2011 (NCSE 2011). The use of Special Needs Assistants (SNA) is the primary system of support used in Ireland for the successful inclusion of children with SEN in mainstream schools (DES 2011). SNA's have been recognised as a valuable resource in the delivery of the physical education (PE) curriculum to students with SEN (NCCA 2004), but despite this, in Ireland no research currently exists which has examined the role that SNA's play in the successful inclusion of SEN students into PE. This research aimed to examine the role of SNA's in PE, as perceived by the SNA's themselves and also PE teachers, through use of questionnaires, focus groups and interviews.

1.2 Background of Research

Special education was once seen as the "exclusive preserve of dedicated professionals who looked after the needs of children and young people who had disabilities" (Griffin and Shevlin, 2007 p. 1). Special schools and classes were established to cater for the education of children with special needs and disabilities and were seen as providing the most appropriate placement for these students (DES 2007). As a result there was little or no need for teachers in mainstream schools to be aware of the needs of children with disabilities in their classrooms (Griffin and Shevlin, 2007). This situation has been dramatically altered in the past two decades when special education policy evolved rapidly due to a heightened awareness of the need to create a "more equitable society" in the early 1990s, requiring a move away from the "segregated model of provision" to one of "access to and inclusion in mainstream schools" for all (DES, 2007 p. 13).

A worldwide interest to promote more inclusive forms of education has since been supported by international agreements, legislation and government policies (Griffin and Shevlin, 2007). Ireland endorsed this international shift to change the face of special education and a number of policy documents and legislative acts have aided in creating more inclusive forms of education over the past 20 years.

The most recent piece of legislation to effect the education rights of children with SEN in Ireland was The Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act in 2004 (Government of Ireland, 2004), which has built on previous legislation such as the Education Act 1998. According to this act, special educational needs refers to:

“a restriction in the capacity of the person to participate in and benefit from education on account of an enduring physical, sensory, mental health or learning disability or any other condition which results in a person learning differently from a person without that condition....”

(EPSEN Act 2004, p. 6.)

This enabling act represented a significant shift from government policy towards the creation of inclusive learning environments and is responsible for putting local support structures into place to deliver special education provisions (Griffin and Shevlin, 2007). The key message of this act was as follows:

“A child with special educational needs shall be educated in an inclusive environment with children who do not have such needs unless the nature or degree of those needs of the child is such that to do so would be inconsistent with—

(a) the best interests of the child as determined in accordance with any assessment carried out under this Act, or

(b) the effective provision of education for children with whom the child is to be educated.”

(EPSEN Act 2004, p7.)

The Act was designed to make detailed provision which would ensure the education of persons who have SEN be guaranteed as a right enforceable in law (NCSE 2004). Regrettably, due to economic circumstances, the EPSEN Act 2004 has not been fully implemented. Although the right to be educated in an inclusive manner and the duties of the school to provide for such have been established, many other aspects of the Act have not been implemented such as statutory rights for assessment, individual education plans and appeals (NCSE 2011). Additionally, it is often argued that although the right to be educated in an “inclusive” environment has been enforced, the resources to allow for this to truly happen are often not granted. This may be attributed to a categorical statement in the Disability Act of 2005 (Government of Ireland 2005, p.5.), relating to provisions being made within the constraints of “*resources available and their obligations in relation to their allocation*”, which undoubtedly presents an “*unambiguous potential opt-out clause*” for the State in relation to the implementation of necessary support structures for special education provision (Megan and MacPhail, 2006a). Consequently lack of available funding and resources have consistently been cited as legitimate reasons for not providing adequate education services to students with SEN.

A notable outcome of the EPSEN Act 2004 was the National Council for Special Education (NCSE), a council which amongst other functions, such as research and planning, is responsible for allocating additional teaching and other resources to

support the special educational needs of children with disabilities (NCSE 2010). One such supporting resource is that of the Special Needs Assistant (SNA).

SNA's are allocated to schools primarily to assist teachers in providing care support for students with disabilities who have additional care needs in order to facilitate their educational placements (DES 2002). The duties of SNA's have been extended beyond this in more recent circulars with additional duties to include participation with *“school development planning, engagement with parents and other duties appropriate to the grade as determined by the needs of the students and school from time to time”* (DES 2011 p.24). It is evident from the literature that SNAs have become the primary method for allowing inclusion of students with SEN into mainstream schools (Elliott 2004; Logan 2006; Takala 2007) and have *“contributed significantly to the enhancement of students' experiences in school”* (DES 2011 p.12). Despite the roles envisaged by the Department of Education circulars for SNAs, research unanimously identifies a discrepancy between the officially prescribed role of the SNA and the actual practice in schools (Lawlor and Cregan 2003; Logan 2006; O'Neill and Rose 2008), with research often stating that the roles practiced are above and beyond that of care needs alone.

The focus of this study is on the inclusion of children with SEN, therefore it is important to put into the context the proportion of the school going population which falls into this category. Over time the definition of SEN has changed significantly and in line with this so too has our understanding of how many students are likely to have them (Meegan and Mac Phail, 2006a). It has been estimated that approximately 18% of all children have SEN, but that not all of these children would require SNA support (DES, 2011). The NCSE reported at the last count in 2011 that there was an estimated 17,512 students with SEN who were allocated resource hours in mainstream post primary school. Three thousand one hundred and thirty five of these students were allocated a SNA, resulting in approximately 1,950 reported SNA's employed in mainstream post primary schools (NCSE, 2011). The numbers of students accessing SNA support has increased

yearly since then, with the latest figure in 2017 showing that there were 2,821 SNAs allocated to students with SEN in mainstream post primary schools (NCSE 2017).

Physical Education (PE) has been well acknowledged as developing the body's strength and physical wellbeing along with providing opportunities for the development of body awareness, improvements in motor skills, concentration, self-esteem and communication, amongst others (NCCA 2003 p.4). In line with this the NCCA recommends that

'Participation for students is an essential prerequisite to learning in physical education. Schools should facilitate, as far as possible, the inclusion of students with disabilities in all physical education activities'

(NCCA, 2003 p. 4).

Whilst physical activity in general has been established as providing significant benefits for all children (Carter and Micheli 2012; Strong et al. 2005), it has been stated in the literature that these benefits are particularly important for individuals with various physical, mental and developmental disabilities (Rimmer, Roland and Yamaki 2007; Cooper and Quatrano 1999). There are numerous reasons for such statements, such as functional movement increases, social gains and improvements in self-confidence (Shifflett et al, 1994). In addition to this lies the fact that people with disabilities have generally been recognised as having low physical fitness levels, which can be attributed to many factors, one of which being a lack of organized opportunity for physical activity participation (Cluphf et al. 2001). It is for this reason that PE in a school setting is such an important platform for children with SEN to receive adequate levels of physical activity (Kodish et al,

2006). Moreover, from an inclusion perspective, PE has frequently been cited as a social arena (Sherrill 2004) and a setting whereby the ability to express oneself and “play games together” can, in the correct context, allow for feelings of being included (Balfe and Travers 2011). Conversely however, PE has also been found to be an arena whereby students with SEN may feel exposed and where their limitations can become visible and obvious to others (Duesund 1993 cited in Bredhal 2013, p 54), which is why a special focus needs to be made to ensure such students have all the support and facilitation possible for their PE class.

Consideration of both the social inclusion aspect of PE, but also the role of PE in improving physical and mental well-being, means it is important that access and participation in PE is viewed as a right. Unlike in most education settings however, the level of participation should be regarded as a question of individual choice of sporting activities across a continuum of segregated, integrated and inclusive approaches, instead of a placement in a context chosen by professionals (Kiuppis 2018). Accordingly, the main goal of inclusion in a sporting context, and thus in PE, should be to assist students with SEN in making their ‘independent’ choice to participate in sporting activities in the way that they want to and are able to (Misener 2014). Consequently, inclusion debates in sporting contexts should be characterized by giving equal importance and validity to segregated, integrated and inclusive structures and activities rather than aiming to substitute one placement for the other (Kiuppis 2018).

In line with this many conceptual frameworks for inclusion in sport and physical activity have been developed (Winnick 1987; Booth, Ainscow, and Kingston 2002; Black and Stephenson 2007; Black and Williamson 2011; Valet 2013) which can also be applied to inclusion in PE. One such conceptual framework which is prominent in the literature and inclusion resources in an Irish context, is the Inclusion Spectrum (Black 1996; Black and Williamson 2011). The inclusion spectrum was first introduced by Ken Black in 1996 (Youth Sport Trust 1996) as a

revision of the “Integration Continuum for Sport Participation” which was developed by Winnick (1987), in 1996. Winnicks’ framework was hierarchical and suggested that inclusive activity was the programme aim with the other strategies outlined as adaptations which would help to achieve this aim. Blacks’ 1996 publication of the inclusion spectrum however re-arranged “the format of the continuum in a manner that gave each strategy equal importance (Youth Sport Trust 1996, p123). Black’s version of an *Inclusion Spectrum* was developed further by him in cooperation with David Tillotson (at that time an advisory teacher of PE in Birmingham) and Stevenson (2009) used that model in her practical work which resulted in the model becoming a tool for practitioners.

The inclusion spectrum proposes five distinct modalities of practice which overlap in principle and are presented on an oval graph (Stevenson 2009; Black and Williamson 2011). A visual representation of the Inclusion Spectrum Model can be seen in Figure 1.1 below. The five modalities are:

- (1) Separate Activity: Special activities, specially thought for and proposed for people with disability and practised in different times and spaces
- (2) Parallel Activity: People with disabilities are grouped by ability and take part in similar activities in the same environment and at the same time but at their own ability level.
- (3) Open Activity: ‘Everyone does the same activity with minimal or no adaptations to the environment or equipment; open activities are by their nature inclusive so that the activity suits every participant.
- (4) Modified Activity Activities designed for all, with specific adaptations to space, tasks, equipment and people’s teaching
- (5) Disability Sport Activity: Reverse integration whereby non-disabled children and adults are included in disability sport together with disabled peers

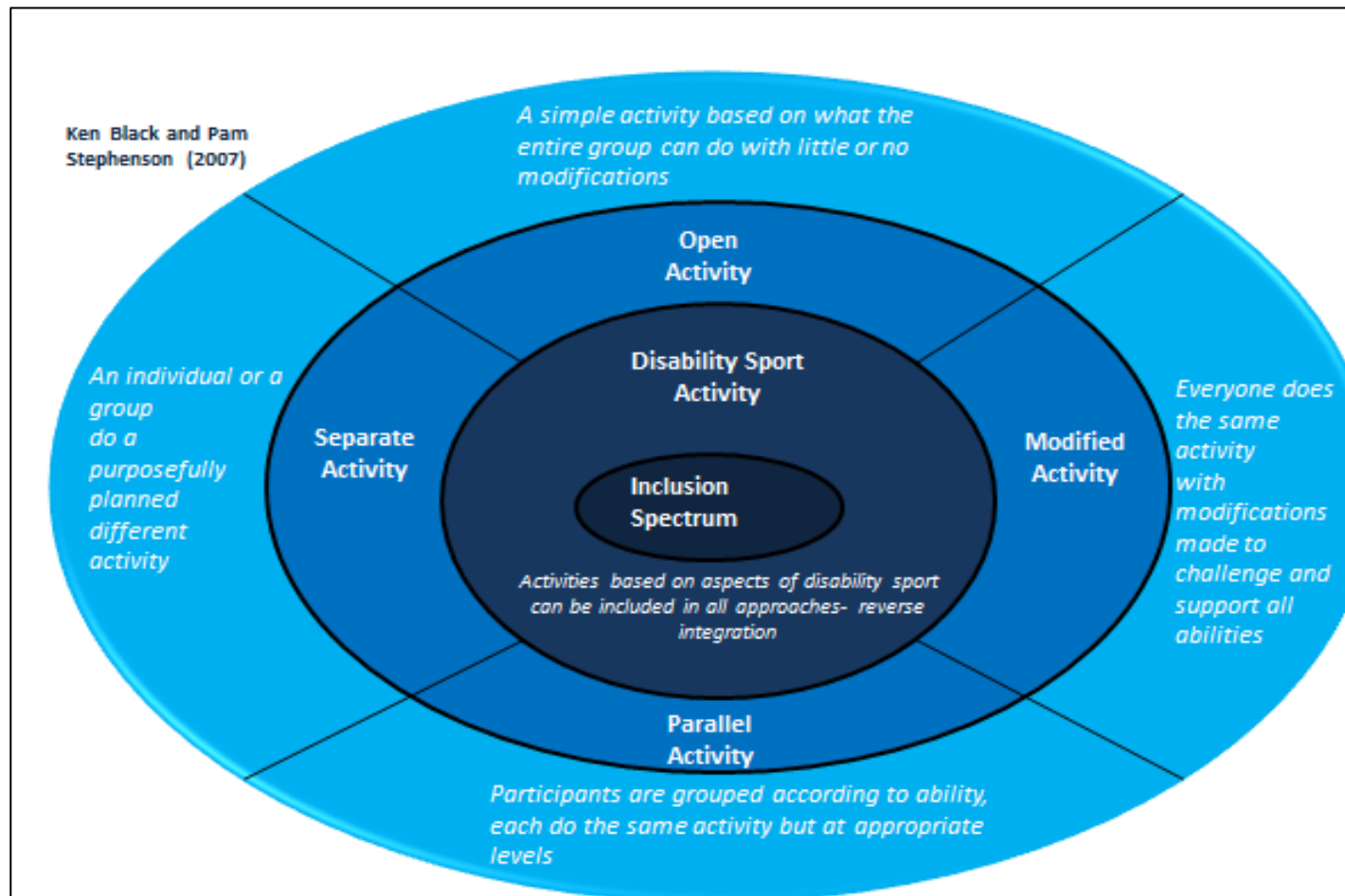


Figure 1.1. Inclusion Spectrum (Black and Stephenson, 2007)

According to the NCSE (2010)

“The class or subject teacher has the primary responsibility for the progress of all students in their class, including those with special educational needs.”

(NCSE 2010 p. 71)

However research has frequently suggested that PE teachers have concerns with facilitating the inclusion of students with SEN (Sweeney and Coulter 2008; Chandler and Green 1995; La Master et al., 1998; Block 2003). This has been explained in part due to the challenges of inclusion being more pronounced in PE class than in classroom confined subjects, due to its practical nature and the organization of groupings (Sweeney and Coulter 2008), but also due to the range of students with SEN presenting to classes (Morley et al. 2005) and the lack of training and knowledge surrounding the nature of SEN conditions and adaptation for children with SEN (Block 2003; Meegan and MacPhail 2006b). As was stated by a PE teacher in study by Sweeney and Coulter

“ I am busy trying to understand the child’s condition and try to teach him even though I have no knowledge of the condition!!!.”

(Sweeney and Coulter 2008 p.41)

To elevate this problem it has been suggested that

“Schools should create a collaborative environment within the school so that teachers can draw from the experiences of others and get the support they need to differentiate effectively and accommodate learners successfully”

(NCSE, 2010 p.71)

With SNA's being identified as the main support system to allow for inclusion of students with SEN into mainstream schools, it seems obvious that these “para-professionals” become the collaborative support that PE teachers appear to often greatly need. This potential partnership has been identified in numerous research here in Ireland (Marron, Murphy and O'Keefe, 2013; Crawford 2011; Sweeney and Coulter, 2008), with PE teachers suggesting that the information SNAs were able to provide regarding the students needs and abilities, was paramount to their success in including them in the session (Marron et al. 2013). This was due in part to their close contact with the students and their unique insights to their needs and abilities. Further to this, SNAs have been identified as assisting in modeling activities, small group assimilation and skill generalization in PE classes (Reid et al. 2003; Crawford et al. 2007).

Research has identified the crucial role of SNAs in schools (Logan 2006) along with clearly indicating in international (Lieberman 2007, Block 2007) and national literature (Marron et al. 2013, Sweeny and Coulter 2008; Crawford, 2011), that paraprofessionals can play a potentially beneficial role in increasing inclusion in PE. Despite this, there remains a lack of research identifying what role SNAs are actually fulfilling in PE at present in Ireland and further to that, what role is expected of SNAs in PE from a school and curricular perspective.

1.3 Research population

1.3.1 Students with SEN

In Ireland, data on SEN and disability is collected by a number of agencies; however, depending on the definition of SEN or disability used, determining the exact numbers of students with SEN in Ireland can be difficult (NCSE 2011). The Census of Population in 2016 (CSO 2016) for example found that 6.2% of the population aged 0-18 years had a disability, where the eligibility criteria for having a disability was defined as “having at least one long-lasting condition”.

This research, however, is looking specifically at SEN rather than disability. The most relevant statistic therefore comes from the NCSE 2006 report, which undertook one of the first attempts to estimate the cohort of the population with SEN. The eligibility criteria which the report used to carry out the estimate was based on the EPSEN Act’s broader definition of SEN:

‘a restriction in the capacity of a person to participate in and benefit from education on account of an enduring physical, sensory, mental health or learning disability, or any other condition which results in a person learning differently from a person without that condition’.

(EPSEN Act, Government of Ireland, 2004, p6)

In taking this broader definition the report found the prevalence of SEN to be 17.7% (NCSE 2006). The report considered the estimate was ‘as reliable a guide’ of the number of children with SEN as was possible to obtain at that time (NCSE 2006, p.73) but provided a much higher estimate of need than had ever been considered before and brings attention to the variability that potentially exists in

defining SEN and disabilities for statistical purposes. In 2011 the NCSE again attempted to report on the prevalence of SEN using the Growing up in Ireland data and found that 25% had some form of SEN.

This is a clear barrier to presenting clarification on the prevalence of SEN however, regardless of the definition used for data collection purposes, what is most evident from statistics from the NCSE which look at the number of children receiving additional educational support, is that the population of children with disabilities is increasing steadily. From 2011/2012 to 2015/2016 the number of students with SEN has increased by 28% from 141,919 (NCSE 2011) to 181,218 (NCSE 2015). Over the same period the total student population in primary and post-primary increased by 7% from 838,977 to 899,106. The number of students with SEN relative to the total student population has increased from 17% to 20% of students with SEN out of the total population of students.

When looking specifically at mainstream education, as this research does, increases in students with SEN can also be seen with 34,140 students in mainstream primary and post primary schools in 2009/10 receiving additional teaching support (NCSE 2009) with an increase to over 39,000 in 2012/13 (NCSE 2012). In post primary mainstream schools alone, the figures from 2009/10 for children with SEN stood at 17,512. The most recent figures released are suggesting a further increase to over 42,000 students (NCSE 2014) with SEN in mainstream post primary and primary schools.

Whilst the focus of this research was on the inclusion of students with SEN, the participants of the research were SNAs and PE teachers, with the primary focus being on SNAs, therefore population statistics for SNAs will be outlined next.

1.3.2 SNAs

The main participants of this research were SNAs who worked in mainstream post primary schools in Ireland. The NCSE publishes the total number of SNAs

allocated to primary, post primary and special schools annually. The number of SNAs allocated to post primary schools has increased yearly since the inception of the scheme in 1998. This research was conducted in the academic year of 2013/14 and 2014/15, there were 2178 and 2185 SNAs allocated to mainstream post primary schools in these years respectively (NCSE 2013, 2014). At the most recent count in 2017 there were 2821 SNAs allocated to mainstream post primary schools.

1.4 Research Aim and Research Questions

The aim of this research was to explore the roles and responsibilities of the SNA in mainstream post primary PE, in relation to the inclusion of students with SEN. To achieve this research aim, five research questions were identified and used to guide the data collection and analysis within this research. The five research questions are as follows:

1. What is the profile of PE Teachers and SNAs teaching in mainstream post primary schools and what is the inclusion profile of these schools?
2. What are the key factors which promote and hinder the inclusion of students with SEN in PE?
3. What are the current roles and responsibilities of the SNA in mainstream post primary schools and what factors influence these roles, from the perspective of the SNA and PE Teacher?
4. What is the current and desired role of the SNA in promoting the inclusion of students with SEN in post primary PE, from the perspective of the SNA and PE Teacher?
5. Is there a demand for the provision of training amongst SNA's on including children with SEN in PE?

1.5 Significance of study

The importance of this research lies in the fundamental right for students with SEN to participate and be included in PE.

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) recommends that:

‘Participation for students is an essential prerequisite to learning in physical education. Schools should facilitate, as far as possible, the inclusion of students with disabilities in all physical education activities’

(NCCA 2003, p. 4).

PE has frequently been cited as a social arena (Sherrill 2004) and a setting whereby the ability to express oneself and ‘play games together’ can, in the correct context, allow for feelings of being included (Balfe and Travers 2011). Without an adaptation however, PE can be an arena whereby students with SEN may feel exposed and where their limitations can become visible and obvious to others (Duesund 1993 cited in Bredhal 2013, p 54) . Therefore it is crucial that support for PE teachers must be established to ensure the positive inclusion of students with SEN into mainstream PE classes.

Despite the indication in the literature (Marron et al., 2013; Crawford 2011; Morley et al 2005) that SNA’s could play a pivotal role in increasing the inclusion of children with SEN in PE class, other than anecdotal evidence, there has yet to be any research conducted on this topic in Ireland to date.

This research therefore provides a novel insight to the role which SNAs and PE teachers believe that SNAs currently fulfill in PE. It also provides insight into the role which SNAs and PE teachers would like SNAs to fulfill in PE. Additionally, it will provide further understanding of the current practices of inclusion in PE, along

with the factors which can promote and hinder inclusion. Aside from the subject of PE, the role of the SNA in general education is also being explored in this research, which will present information which can help to comprehend the role of the SNA from the SNAs perspective, along with PE teachers.

The findings of this research therefore have implications which could influence policy development, training and education and practical implementation guidelines for the use of SNAs in mainstream education and in PE in particular.

The CARA Adapted Physical Activity Centre in Tralee have developed a pilot training programme for Inclusion in PE within the last year, which can be completed by anybody interested including teachers, SNA, school staff, coaches etc. However, this is a general introduction to inclusion in PE, which is not specifically aimed at SNAs. Therefore, with no training and education programme currently available in inclusion in PE for SNAs and PE teachers in Ireland, which would address the unique challenges of working collaboratively in PE class towards inclusion, the findings from this research has major potential to directly influence the development of a novel training programme. Additionally, this research can provide solid research based evidence to support the contents of such a training programme, which does not currently exist.

1.6 Limitations of study

1. The response rate to the questionnaire was low at 15% for SNAs and approximately 26% for PE teachers (based on the assumption that each of the 732 schools employed at least one PE teacher). The low response rate has the potential to cause non response bias however the participant's profiles (age, gender, SEN type in schools) showed good representativeness with the sample of respondents accurately reflecting elements of the population of SNAs and PE teachers in general.
2. The research has a time limitation given that the data was collected in 2014/15 and the climate for PE and also the SNA scheme has started to change in the year 2017/18. In discussing the research findings the new developments in the PE curriculum, the allocation model for SEN and the proposed changes for the SNA scheme are all considered and deliberated in relation to their impact on the outcomes of this research.
3. Missing data from the questionnaires as a result of participant non response to certain items is a limitation to the validity of some of the data, in the cases of a high number of missing values this has been noted with the presentation of results.
4. PE Teachers and SNAs participated in the questionnaire aspect of the data collection however the focus groups and interviews were only conducted

with SNAs due to lack of time and resources. This is a potentially limitation to the qualitative research findings.

1.7 Delimitations of study

1. The participants of this research were limited to SNAs and PE teachers working in mainstream post primary schools in the republic of Ireland only.
2. The participants of the focus groups and interviews were limited to SNAs.
3. The participants of the focus groups and interviews were limited to those who had provided contact details following completion of the questionnaire and who had addresses in counties in the province of Leinster.
4. This research did not examine the roles of SNAs from the perception of students with SEN, parents of students with SEN or school principals/SEN co-ordinators.
5. This research did not seek to explore attitudes to inclusion using any standardised measures.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.1 Inclusive Education

2.1.1 Education for All

Slee (2001a p.116) stated that 'Inclusive education is not about special needs, it is about all students'. This philosophy of inclusive education takes the stance that inclusion is 'more than a concern with one group of pupils such as those who have been or are likely to be excluded from school... It is about equal opportunities for all children and young people whatever their age, gender, ethnicity, attainment or background' (Slee, 2001, p.1). This wide view of inclusion perceives that all students may require some form of additional support, for numerous reasons, at some stage in their school career (Winter and O'Raw 2010). Inclusive education in this regard seeks to address barriers to learning and participation, and provide resources to support learning and participation (Ainscow et al. 2006) for all who are at risk of marginalisation, for which there can be a multitude of reasons, including but not limited to ability, gender, race, ethnicity, language, care status, socioeconomic status, disability, sexuality, or religion (Gerschel, 2003). This concept of broad inclusion, or "Education for All", is being promoted as the preferred focus of research and policy development on inclusion by some academics, as opposed to restricting it only to the education of students identified as having SEN for example (Booth and Ainscow 1998; Winter and O'Raw 2010).

Researchers on the opposing side however have conveyed concern that this broader focus of enquiry in inclusion may lead to the needs of students with SEN , and those of other specific groups, being overlooked (Farrell 2004). Therefore, while the perception that inclusive education research and policy should encompass all those who are at risk of marginalization is one of value, it is seen as equally important that the knowledge developed in the area of special education would not get lost in taking this "all-encompassing approach" (Winter and O' Raw 2010 p. 5). Consequently, for the purpose of this research the focus of enquiry will be specifically on inclusion of students with SEN rather than any other specific

groups, However the researcher appreciates that many of the themes which will be discussed may also be applicable and transferrable to other areas of inclusive education.

2.1.2 Defining Special Educational Needs and Disability

It is important to state that the terms SEN and disability are often and incorrectly regarded as synonymous. In general, SEN is the term which is used for the educational context while disability is used for the wider concept of Inclusion. Therefore, whilst the focus of this research was on students with SEN, reference will be made throughout the literature review to existing research and statistics which use the term disability rather than SEN. In the context of this, definitions of SEN and disability will be presented below, with further discussion of SEN definitions being outlined in section 2.1.5.

Special Educational Needs

The focus of this research was on students with SEN, SEN are defined by the EPSEN Act 2004 in Ireland as;

“a restriction in the capacity of the person to participate in and benefit from education on account of an enduring physical, sensory, mental health or learning disability, or any other condition which results in a person learning differently from a person without that condition and cognate words shall be construed accordingly”

(EPSEN Act, Government of Ireland, 2004, p6).

Disability

Different definitions of disability are used in different contexts – for example to set eligibility for particular services, or to outlaw discrimination on grounds of disability. There can also be a wide range of difference between how individuals with a particular condition are affected, ranging from mild to severe difficulties. A person's environment, which includes the supports they have and the physical or social barriers they face, influences the scale of the challenges they face in everyday life.

The World Health Organisation (2011 p.3) states that “disability is complex, dynamic, multidimensional, and contested.” The report defines disabilities as

“an umbrella term, covering impairments, activity limitations, and participation restrictions. Impairment is a problem in body function or structure; an activity limitation is a difficulty encountered by an individual in executing a task or action; while a participation restriction is a problem experienced by an individual in involvement in life situations.”

In Ireland, the definitions of disability which are used most predominantly in research and statistics are derived from the Disability Act (2005), The Equality Act (2010) and the Census (2011).

The Disability Act (2005) sets out the following definition of disability:

“Disability, in relation to a person, means a substantial restriction in the capacity of the person to carry on a profession, business or occupation in the State or to participate in social or cultural life in the State by reason of an enduring physical, sensory, mental health or intellectual impairment”

The Equality Act (2004), which outlaws discrimination on grounds of disability, used a wider definition, and covers past as well as current disability:

"Disability means:

(a) the total or partial absence of a person's bodily or mental functions, including the absence of a part of a person's body;

(b) the presence in the body of organisms causing, or likely to cause, chronic disease or illness;

(c) the malfunction, malformation or disfigurement of a part of a person's body;

(d) a condition or malfunction which results in a person learning differently from a person without the condition or malfunction; or

(e) a condition, disease or illness which affects a person's thought processes, perception of reality, emotions or judgement or which results in disturbed behaviour."

Census (2011) used the following definition of disability:

"A person with one or more of the following long-lasting conditions or difficulties:

- Blindness or a severe vision impairment*
- Deafness or a severe hearing impairment*
- An intellectual disability*
- A difficulty with learning, remembering or concentrating*
- A difficulty with basic physical activities*
- A psychological or emotional condition*
- A difficulty with pain, breathing, or any other chronic illness or condition"*

Special Educational Needs and Disability in Education

Until the academic year 2017/18, resources hours for students with SEN were assigned on the basis of 14 identified categories of disability/special educational needs. Needs were further divided into “low incidence” categories and “high incidence” categories (DES, 2005). In 2013 an NCSE report suggested that “the diagnosis of disability should not be the prerequisite determinant for the allocation of additional resources for students with SEN. They should instead be based on an assessment of student needs’ (NCSE, 2013, p5) and furthermore the fact that some children with SEN are ‘unable to access the professional assessments on which resources for low incidence disabilities are based’ (NCSE, 2013, p5) makes it an inequitable system. In addition to this Rose et al (2015) suggested that the same support level is allocated to each child within a particular disability category despite the fact that student support needs within a particular category of disability may vary widely. In 2013, the NCSE concluded that the ‘current support allocation model does not provide all children with equitable access to educational supports’ (NCSE, 2013, p5) and recommended to the Minister for Education and Skills that a working group should be established to examine this issue.

Following the NCSE (2014) working group recommendations, the allocation of resources to students with SEN was amended in 2017 with the publication of Circular 0014/2017. Schools are now allocated a baseline of resources for inclusion and additional resources based on the overall educational profile of the school, which includes a specific allocation for students with SEN who are identified as having complex needs.

This element of the profile refers to a small number of students with enduring conditions that significantly affect their capacity to learn. Their SEN may arise from any one or more of the following:

- Very significant difficulties in physical and/or sensory functioning.

- Very significant difficulties in cognitive and adaptive functioning.
- Very significant difficulties in social communication and social interaction, combined with rigid and repetitive patterns of behaviour.

Students to be included in this element of the profile will be identified through the use of agreed descriptors to be developed by NCSE, NEPS and HSE, for use by NEPS psychologists and relevant HSE professionals. The use of descriptors, rather than disability category, will ensure that students are included on the basis of their educational needs rather than category of disability (NCSE, 2014).

This move towards identifying needs through the use of descriptors of disability and needs highlights the ways in which definitions of disability and SEN can, and do, interlink within educational contexts in Ireland. In line with this new allocation model and move towards the use of descriptors of disabilities, students with SEN are now being referred to as students with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) in educational contexts. For the purpose of this study however the term special educational needs (SEN) will continue to be used as it was the correct terminology for period of time that this research was conducted.

2.1.3 History of Disability

Children with disabilities have been prominent in society for centuries however according to Griffin and Shevlin (2007) until recent times people with disabilities were often viewed as the 'other' and often as a threat to the well-being of the community . This lead to the marginalisation of people with disabilities and resulted in the need for them to fight for their own rights. Society has responded in various ways throughout the centuries-from creating myths to explain the birth of a less-than-perfect child, to keeping the child out of sight in the home or in institutions or by letting the young adult wander or fend for itself (Mc Cormack 2004).

During Greek and Roman times disability was seen as a sign that parents had displeased the gods, with infanticide commonly being used as a sacrifice to the gods. Society however was slightly more tolerant of disability acquired later in life as a result of war or unhealthy living environments. In Medieval times the focus of explanation for disabilities turned to demonological causes where it was thought disability occurred as a result of possession and thus needed exorcism. Slightly more positive attitudes began to emerge at times with pilgrimages held to try obtain “cures”. Further attempts to “cure” disabilities began to develop during the early modern period, between the 15th and 18th century, however these were generally in cruel ways with little understanding of medical causes of disability or anatomy in general.

This focus on physical cures for disabilities indicated the significant move away from the previously dominant supernatural understanding of causes of disability and the early stages of the development of the medical model of disability, which will be discussed later in this review. The eugenics movement had a major influence on societal attitudes towards and treatment of people with disabilities from the end of the 19th century into the middle of twentieth century (Griffin and Shevlin 2007). It was believed that people with general learning disabilities had an incurable disease, were a threat to the purity of the gene pool and were a social menace. People with illness, disability and poverty began to be seen as burden as they were seen to be unable to contribute to society in a meaningful way.

Workhouses, institutions and residential schools were therefore established throughout Europe with increasing involvement of medical professionals, total segregation from mainstream society and categorisation by disability type (Gash and Noonan Walsh 2004).

From an Irish perspective the beginning of the 19th century was a time when the country had just undergone a 20 year economic boom and with the prosperity of cities such as Dublin came the “social problems” of “vagabonds and sturdy beggars” pestering the wealthy for their money (Griffin and Shelvin 2007). The response was the opening of the Dublin House of Industry, with a catch all, one

stop solution to every social problem: “the beggars, the ill, the disabled, the destitute and the troublesome.” (Mc Cormack 2004, p9). During this period the only way you could receive state help for disability was to enter into a workhouse such as the House of Industry and by the time of the Great Hunger (1845-1852), there were reportedly 163 such workhouses.

By the end of the 19th Century there were 22 designated “lunatic asylums”, where staff and inmates lived without any outside interaction, representing total isolation between those with disabilities and the outside world. With such isolation came the separation of the “problem” of disability from societies responsibility and an ignorance to the treatment which was occurring within many of these workhouses, which was often that of abuse and neglect (McCormack, 2004).

During the 1850s there began to be developments surrounding the “special” needs of people with disabilities, in particular learning difficulties. These developments stemmed partially from the work of Itard and Seguin in France who had influences in small facilities in England which had a strong belief that people with learning difficulties could be “taught to lead a useful life” (Mc Cormack, 2004, p.14). As a result of this, specialised institutions began to open in Ireland between the middle and end of the 19th Century with the focus on training up to the age of 18 years at which point people with disabilities would return to their families. These institutions however relied heavily on voluntary donations and charitable religious organisations.

By the middle of the 20th century the establishment of the United Nations, internationally, and the beginning of the disability rights movement in the US, marked the begging of change for people with disabilities.

In 1945 the United Nations was formed placing human rights as one of the core goals of the organization, with a specific commitment to promote the full and effective participation of persons with disabilities in all aspects of society and development being deeply rooted in the goals of its Charter.

In 1948, the UN General Assembly (GA) adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) which promoted the right to life, liberty and security of all persons in society, including the fostering of all such rights in the event of, among other circumstances, disability.

Although this period marked some significant changes disability largely remained as a condition that was given consideration in the context of rehabilitation and social protection. In 1975 however the Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons promoted social integration of persons with disabilities, on the basis of their inherent dignity and human rights, setting standards for equal treatment and accessibility to services which really marked the beginning of the transition from the 'medical/social welfare model' approach to disability to "social/human rights" model of promoting the equal rights and opportunities for persons with disabilities (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2018).

During this time period, a disability rights movement began to initiate significant change in the US, encouraged by the Civil Rights Movements and the Womens Rights Movements. Groups of people with disabilities along with their family, friends and supportive professionals began to fight for recognition that the barriers for people with disabilities to partake in society were less related to individual impairment and more attributable to societal attitudes and accessibility barriers (Braddock and Parish 2001). The disability rights movement resulted in the passing of the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990 which provided the first comprehensive civil rights protection for people with disabilities.

It stated that local, state, and federal governments and programmes be accessible, that employers with more than 15 employees make "reasonable accommodations" for workers with disabilities and not discriminate against otherwise qualified workers with disabilities. The act also mandated that public accommodations be made for access to stores and restaurants along with public transport (Shapiro 1993).

The disability rights movement rapidly diffused throughout Europe in the latter part of the 20th century (Vanhala 2015) and by the end of the 1980s most of the large institutions, such as workhouses and large residential hospitals, in Europe were closed (Emerson and Hatton 1994) and the emphasis began to shift towards supported community living, employment and education. The UK lead the way with regard to legislation for people with disabilities in Europe with the introduction of the Disability Discrimination Act (1995). In Ireland eventually a shift emerged from the token charity provision for people with disabilities towards one of legal rights and entitlements, with the publication of a report by the Commission of the Status of People with Disabilities in 1996. The report was accepted as the blueprint for disability law reform in Ireland and made over 400 recommendations which have resulted in various legislative acts coming into place from that time onwards (Quinn and Redmond, 2005). These included, the Employment Equality Act 1998; the Education Act 1998; the National Disability Authority Act 1999; the Comhairle Act 2000; the Equal Status Act 2000; the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004 and the Disability Act 2005, all of which have improved the rights and equality of people with disabilities in education, employment and provision of goods and services.

Moving into the 21st Century, the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) became the first the first legally binding international agreement document for the protection of the human rights of people with disabilities. This was signed by Ireland in 2007 but was the last European country to ratify this, 12 years later in 2018. This most recent development signifies that as a nation we stand with our European and international counterparts in ensuring equality for people with disabilities. What remains to be seen is how the Irish government manages the implementation of measures to allow for this equality to be achieved.

This shift towards legal rights and entitlements has significantly paved the way for inclusion in education which is at the core of this research, and whilst it is clear from looking back through a historical perspective that the disability movement has

come a long way, it has been a slow and at times tenuous process which most would argue is still on-going.

2.1.4 Legislation, Policy and Plans for Inclusion in Education

In 1948 the UN Human Rights Declaration, which stated that “all Humans are born free and equal in dignity and rights”, began to be used as a tool to drive social change in the context of race, gender and religious beliefs. This later facilitated the impetus for change for people with disabilities. The Americans with Disabilities Act (1990) was one of the first laws which recognised that discrimination against people with disabilities, in the form of purposeful unequal treatment and historical patterns of segregation and isolation, was the major problem facing people with disabilities and not their individual impairments (Braddock and Parish 2001, p50).

Education is a fundamental human right, as maintained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 1948). All children have the same rights to educational opportunities under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, regardless of whether they have a disability or not (United Nations, 1989). The move towards inclusive education and away from the acceptance of segregated education for students with SEN has been reflected in legislative and policy trends over the past 30 years (Winter and O’ Raw 2010).

The US was one of the first countries to introduce such legislation with the introduction of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, which was later changed to the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) in 1990 and updated again in 1997, to promote ‘whole-school’ approaches to inclusion (Evans and Lunt 2002). Many EU countries followed in their footsteps and all now have some legislation in place to promote inclusive education (Winter and O’Raw 2010).

This international movement towards the creation of inclusive legislation was endorsed by the UNESCO Salamanca statement (UNESCO 1994), to which the Irish government is a signatory, and is reflective of the UN’s global strategy of

Education for All (Farrell and Ainscow 2002). The Salamanca statement and its accompanying Framework for Action, focuses on the development of inclusive schools' in relation to the international goal of achieving education for all" and it says: 'Schools should accommodate all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, linguistic or other conditions' (UNESCO, 1994, p6). With this statement being based on a rights-based perspective of education, it has been maintained that it is one of the most important international documents in the field of special education (Winter and O' Raw 2010). The statements commitment to "Reaffirming the right to education of every individual, as enshrined in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and renewing the pledge made by the world community at the 1990 World Conference on Education for All to ensure that right for all, regardless of individual differences" (UNESCO 1994, p.vii) is seen to be imperative to the inclusive education movement.

Other important international human rights legislation to enshrine the rights to inclusive education consists of the UN Standard Rules on the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (United Nations, 1993), the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989) and the Dakar Framework for Action (UNESCO 2000).

In May 2003, the Council of Europe further sanctioned the move towards inclusion by advising that efforts should be made to give children with disabilities the opportunity to attend a mainstream school if it is in their best interests. Further to this, in the Council of Europe's Disability Action Plan (2006), one of the main objectives is, "to ensure that disabled people have the opportunity to seek a place in mainstream education by encouraging relevant authorities to develop educational provision to meet the needs of their disabled populations" Council of Europe's Disability Action Plan 2006 p16). (Winter and O'Raw 2010).

In 2006, the UN International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNICRPD) further emphasized the role of government in providing an inclusive

education for all learners, at all levels of the education system. The Convention also places the responsibility for education with national government so that:

- people with disabilities are not excluded from the mainstream of education as a result of their disability
- people with disabilities can access education on the same basis as their peers in their own community
- provision of reasonable accommodation support to facilitate this access
- support is available within the mainstream to facilitate effective teaching and learning
- effective individualised support is available to maximise social, emotional and academic progress that is consistent with the goals of inclusion

(UNCRPD, 2006, Art. 24).

Ireland signed the UNCRPD in March 2007 and 11 years later in 2018 this was ratified by the Irish government. In addition to these international moves for inclusion and disability rights, many legislative and policy changes have also occurred in Ireland to allow for inclusive education, as outlined in the paragraph below.

Irish Legislative Policy

The current system of educational provision for students with SEN in Ireland is based, for the most part, on the findings of the Special Education Review Committee (SERC, 1993). This review examined: integration; teacher education; curriculum development; and the assessment and primacy of parents in decision-making. A key recommendation of the SERC report that had significant implications for the integration of students with SEN and their peers (who did not have such needs) was the establishment of resource teachers in mainstream settings to facilitate an inclusive classroom environment.

While the SERC report provided the recommendations for the provision of inclusive education, it was the White Paper *Charting our Education Future* (1995) which was the major catalyst for the development of a whole series of policies in Ireland which ensured the right of access to inclusive education. Subsequently educational and anti-discriminatory policies were developed which included changes to work legislation, as well as new legal obligations for the State, schools and third-level educational establishments.

In the Irish context, the right for students with SEN to gain access to, and benefit from, education has been addressed by a number of government policies which include: the Education Act (1998); the Education (Welfare) Act (2000); the Equal Status Acts (2000); the Equality Act (2004); and the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act (EPSEN, 2004).

The ground breaking *Education Act (1998)* is particularly noteworthy. This act provided the statutory basis for education provision for children of compulsory schooling age and within this document the rights of children with SEN to access education is stated as follows....."that there is made available to each person resident in the State, including a person with a disability or who has other special educational needs, support services and a level and quality of education appropriate to meeting the needs and abilities of that person." (Education Act 1998, Section 7).

The Equal Status Act (2000) followed in the footsteps of the Education Act in requiring schools to provide "reasonable accommodation, including special treatment, facilities or adjustments to meet the needs of the child with disability if that child would find it unduly difficult to participate in school without it." (Rose et al 2015).

It was the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act (EPSEN, 2004) however which has been hailed as representing “a milestone in developing an infrastructure to support the education of children and young people with SEN” (Rose et al. 2015 p13). With inclusion being stated as a core principle within the preamble to the Act, its importance within this legislation is explicit:

“To provide that the education ... shall, wherever possible, take place in an inclusive environment with those who do not have such needs, to provide that people with special educational needs shall have the same right to avail of, and benefit from, appropriate education as do their peers who do not have such needs. To assist children with special educational needs to leave school with the skills necessary to participate, to the level of their capacity, in an inclusive way in the social and economic activities of society and to live independent and fulfilled lives.”

(Preamble, EPSEN Needs Act, 2004)

The EPSEN Act set out specific guidelines to manage the delivery of resources to students with SEN including “individualised assessment processes, educational planning and monitoring of student outcomes” (Rose et al 2015 p.13). Due to economic constraints, however, important components of the EPSEN Act remain to be implemented, such as the statutory obligation to develop individual education plans (IEPs) and assessment processes for students with SEN.

In compliance with Section 54 of the Education Act (1998), the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) was created in 2003. Its functions are specified under Section 20 of the EPSEN Act (2004) which included but are not limited to:

- The planning and co-ordination of education for children with SEN and making sure that a continuum of provision is available.
- Directing and authorising research.

- Providing advice for the Minister for Education and Skills on special education.
- Distributing information on special education to stakeholders and interested parties.
- Conferring with voluntary bodies to enable their contribution to the development of policy advice by the NCSE.
- Evaluating the educational provision available for adults with disabilities (further, higher and/or continuing education) and informing educational institutions about best practice in relation to the education of adults with disability

(Rose et al 2015 p 13)

Furthermore, the NCSE are responsible for employing special education needs organisers (SENO), who support the assessment and resource allocation process in schools.

It must be noted however that due to the ongoing economic climate in Ireland over the past decade, determining the amount of resources the DES can allocate to schools to facilitate students with SEN, 'best practice', as advised by the EPSEN Act 2004, is currently 'on hold' (Scanlon 2013). Therefore, common practice has resulted in the schools board of management being given the primary responsibility for dictating the policies and practices within schools and ultimately creating the “inclusive school”. As such, there is potentially a huge disparity between schools as regards the experiences of inclusion for children with SEN, despite the legislation and policy guidelines which have been developed (Scanlon 2013).

2.1.5 Models of Disability

Although legislation and policy have been the foundation for allowing equality of people with disabilities in society, it is likely that such legislation would never have occurred if societal perception of disability had not first changed. Models of disability have played a vital part in explaining the changes in societal perceptions of disability throughout the history of the disability movement and have defined disability, influenced professional practice and guided legislation throughout the decades (Albredht, Seelman and Bury 2001). Furthermore, models of disability have a central role to play in the inclusion of students with SEN in mainstream education as they continue to have a powerful influence on resource allocation and agency and educational policies (Smart, 2009). For example, until the introduction of the new allocation model for resources for students with SEN (DES 2017; NCSE 2014) diagnosis of disability was a prerequisite to an assessment of SEN which would enable students to access resources needed for inclusive education. This approach towards the allocation of resources reflects the philosophy underpinned by the medical model of disability. In 2010 however, a report commissioned by the NCSE (Desforges and Lindsay 2010) challenged this approach and cited evidence from academic theory and research to clearly support the use of the biopsychosocial model as “providing the best fit to the complexities of identifying and providing an appropriate education to children and young people with SEN” (Desforges and Lindsay 2010, p5). The report further states that using an approach based on the biopsychosocial model of disability, recognises the reality of disability while acknowledging a degree of overlapping needs, as well as the important variations among children with SEN that reflect individual factors (Desforges and Lindsay 2010).

Despite the powerful impacts which models of disability can hold however, it is important to note that they are “not reality or fact, but rather human-made

representations of reality” (Smart 2009, p3). Therefore no one model is “morally neutral” (Smart 2009, p3) and no one model is capable of explaining the entire disability experience. Rather models of disability can be referred to as frameworks for understanding the causes of disability and, by implication, the means to facilitate them (Altman 2001).

Given their relative importance, it is necessary to further explore models of disability within this literature review, in order to understand their place and influence on the evolution of the disability movement, the SEN movement and in turn the inclusive education movement. Such a preliminary evaluation of various models of disability is important, because, as Smart (2004,p25–29) points out, such models serve a number of important purposes:

- Models of disability provide definitions of disability.
- Models of disability provide explanations of causal attribution and responsibility attributions.
- Models of disability are based on (perceived) needs.
- Models guide the formulation and implementation of policy.
- Models of disability are not value neutral.
- Models of disability determine which academic disciplines study and learn about PWDs.
- Models of disability shape the self-identity of PWDs.
- Models of disability can cause prejudice and discrimination.

Charity/Religious Model

Dating back to the Middle Ages, but still existent in some social and cultural contexts, is the charity/religious model of disability. This model understood disability within the context of poverty, abandonment and social vulnerability. The underlying ideal in this model was one of justice in a divine authority (Griffo 2014), with some people, if not many, believing that disabilities were the result of lack of adherence to social morality and religious proclamations that warn against engaging in certain behavior (Henderson and Bryan 2011). Further to this it has been noted that such beliefs are evident in preaching, with some forms of Bible interpretation excluding PWDs by directly or indirectly equating “blindness”, “lameness”, “deafness”, “uncleanness” (chronic illness), mental illness (demonic possession), and other forms of disability . . . with human sin, evil, or spiritual ineptitude’ (McClure 2007, p23).

Although the fundamental principles of this model undoubtedly created negative perceptions of disability and impacted on the social inclusion of individuals with disabilities (Rimmerman 2013), the model did lead to the development of many charitable institutions, which assisted in the care of people with disabilities and also organized fundraising for the needs of people with disabilities and their families.

Although the activities organized by such charities are praiseworthy in many respects, critics would argue that such activities posed certain dangers. For example many such charitable institutions would have taken people with disabilities in as residents which were overlaid with segregatory practices of social exclusion and institutionalization, having consequences in terms of social stigma of people with disabilities (Griffo 2014). In this regard this model can be seen as dis-enabling and causing discrimination towards people with disabilities.

Medical Model of Disability

The medical model “focuses on individual pathology and attempts to find ways of preventing, curing or caring for disabled people. Given that the focus is on the individual, a central concern is to make an accurate diagnosis of their ‘condition’.” (Marks 1997, p86). This model has been labeled as having a deficiency orientation (Wright 1991). Within this model, disability can be quantified, measured and classified. Therefore, disability seems to be a standardized entity with the medical diagnoses including an evaluative rating which uses "normality" as the standard of the severity of disability (Smart 2009). In essence, the medical model treats all people with the same diagnosis with identical treatment plans. It takes no account of differences in the individuals' needs, resources, or assets and totally ignores the social aspects of disablement (Smart 2009).

The medical model is often seen to be dehumanizing because of the focus on deficiencies (Bricout et al. 2004) and is particularly unsuited to considerations of person-environment interaction as factors actively shaping disability (Fougeyrollas and Beauregard 2001). The model has been described as being "diagnosis-driven" rather than "individual focused" and has even been criticized as causing prejudice and discrimination toward people with disabilities (Wade and de Jong 2000).

Of course it must be noted that there was not a deliberate intention to bestow discrimination and injustice upon people with disabilities by the Medical Model (Bickenbach 1993). On the contrary, this model was developed to treat disability and as such, much of the medicine, medical technology, pharmacology and medical expertise which are used today, developed from this model and have greatly enhanced the lives of people with disabilities in today's society (Smart 2009). Therefore it is fair to state that few would argue for the complete abandonment of the Medical Model simply because there are biological realities to the experience of disability. Rather advocates of disability rights would

recommend that the additional factors which influence people with disabilities functionally ability in society be equally recognised as important (Smith 2010).

Social Model of Disability

Many activists and academics associated with the disability movement have criticized the medical model of disability, stating that by focusing on the defects in intellectual and bodily functions, there is a failure to acknowledge the defects in the environment (Marks 1997). Such individuals would argue that social factors influence the degree of disability experienced rather than the medical deficits which the disability presents. Such social factors have been stated to include the nature of the built environment, social hierarchy, legislation, attitudes and culture, to name but a few (Marks 1997). In the 1970's in the United Kingdom, the Social Model evolved from the theoretical philosophy outlined above, which heavily criticized the previous medical model, and then spread widely across the English-speaking world (Griffo 2014).

The social model is a theoretical elaboration which stemmed from considerable struggles for independent living and civil rights for people with disabilities. In the midst of such a movement towards civil rights for people with disabilities, a number of activists and academics argued that many restrictions imposed on people with disabilities are not a natural result of their impairment, but are a consequence of a social environment which fails to take account of their differences (Marks 1997). The social model of disability posits that “disability is a social construction which is to say that society creates “disability” by imposing hindrances to the full participation of persons with different abilities” (Bricout et al. 2004, p. 50).

For example, post office counters and letterboxes are built for the comfort of people over 5 feet tall, rather than short people, wheelchair users or children. Barnes therefore defines disability as “the loss or limitation of opportunities to take

part in the normal life of the community on an equal level with others due to physical and social barriers” (Barnes 1994 p.88)

While more broadly accepted by disability activists and academics, this model, which was developed solely in opposition to the medical model of disability, is not without its limits. In its disregard for other important elements of consideration within disability, it can only partially explain how such a phenomenon affects individuals. Furthermore, just as there is no such thing as the perfect body, there is also no such thing as the perfect environment, thus the challenge in creating an environment that will suit all abilities is a significant one. The social model may also be criticized for failing to acknowledge the significance of emotional and bodily experience, or linking the social world and lived, embodied experience (Marks, 1997). However, this model had a strong influence on persons with disabilities and their organisations, strengthening their commitment to creating inclusive societies where everyone might live with equality of opportunity (Griffo 2014)

The failure of the social model of disability to address impairment as an observable attribute of an individual's lived experience is a critique which has been presented by Palmer and Harley (2012). It is suggested that within this failure lies an attempt to separate impairment from disability completely which results in a failure to fully account for the lived experiences of people with disabilities (Bingham et al., 2013; Palmer and Harley, 2012).

A second critique of the social model of disability is its failure to account for individual differences (Haeghele and Hodge 2016). For example it is argued that the “social model ignores the intersectionality of different forms of oppressed states” (Fitzgerald 2006, cited in Haeghele and Hodge 2016, p. 198), meaning that it cannot understand the experiences of an individual with a disability independently of other

attributes of the individual, such as gender, race, or sexual orientation (Haegele and Hodge, 2016).

Biopsychosocial Model

As a result of the debate triggered by the development of the social model of disability but with recognition that this model could not fully define disability, the World Health Organisation developed a new model in 2001 named the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) (WHO 2001). This model sought to overcome the extremism of the social model whilst encompassing the strengths of the medical model and thus developed the biopsychosocial model of disability. The bio-psycho-social model of disability states that 'disability' is an umbrella word encompassing many interlinked factors and highlights the close relationship between a person's states of health and contextual factors, mainly environmental, which can either facilitate or hinder their social participation.

The World Health Organisation describes the model as such:

“The ICF, provides a standard language and framework for the description of health and health-related states. It is a classification of health and health-related domains -- domains that help us to describe changes in body function and structure, what a person with a health condition can do in a standard environment (their level of capacity), as well as what they actually do in their usual environment (their level of performance). These domains are classified from body, individual and societal perspectives by means of two lists: a list of body functions and structure, and a list of domains of activity and participation. In ICF, the term functioning refers to all body functions, activities and participation, while disability is similarly an umbrella

term for impairments, activity limitations and participation restrictions. ICF also lists environmental factors that interact with all these components.”

(WHO, 2002, p. 2)

The emphasis in this model has changed from focusing on people's disabilities to focusing on people's levels of functioning and health. Importantly this model recognizes that every human being can experience a decrease in health and therefore experience some disability, this acknowledgement “mainstreams” the experience of disabilities.

In relation to education and in particular to the assessment and identification of SEN, the biopsychosocial model of disability has been increasingly adopted by European countries as a framework for the assessment of needs (Desforges and Lindsay 2010). Although the recommendation for its use was publicised in 2010 in Ireland (Desforges and Lindsay 2010), it has only been since the enactment of circular 0014/2017 (DES 2017) that its use for guiding the allocation of resources and assessment of needs can truly be seen. The new approach, guided by the biopsychosocial model, gives equal importance to within-person factors as well as environmental factors which can provide support and/or cause stress to the individual leading to either limitations or enhancements of performance and participation in education. The role of SEN provision therefore is to enhance the support factors, and reduce the impact of stress factors and other barriers to learning (Desforges and Lindsay 2010).

2.1.6 The Emergence of Inclusion in Education: Past, Present and Future

Special education was once seen as *the “exclusive preserve of dedicated professionals who looked after the needs of children and young people who had disabilities”* (Griffin and Shevlin, 2007 p. 1). Special schools and classes were established to cater for the education of children with special needs and disabilities and were seen as providing the most appropriate placement for these students (DES, 2007). As a result there was little or no need for teachers in mainstream schools to be aware of the needs of children with disabilities in their classrooms (Griffin and Shevlin, 2007). This segregated education of children with disabilities was seen as necessary because they were considered to be unable to benefit from regular methods of instruction (Thomas, Walker and Webb, 1998). The medical model of disability would have been the model supporting this segregated special education, through its views that the barriers to learning were within the child as opposed to his/her environment. This segregated approach remained unchallenged for many years with all believing that separate provision was the most suitable and most effective option for meeting the needs of a “minority of children while safeguarding the efficient education of the majority” (Winter and O’Raw 2010, p5).

This situation has been dramatically altered in the past two decades when special education policy has evolved rapidly due to a heightened awareness of the need to create a *“more equitable society”* in the early 1990s, requiring a move away from the *“segregated model of provision”* to one of *“access to and inclusion in mainstream schools”* for all (DES 2007 p. 13). This development began with the rise of the world-wide civil rights movement in the 1960s, when people with disabilities and their advocates started to challenge the restrictive nature of segregated education leading to political pressure which would ultimately bring

legislative changes to revolutionize education. By the end of the twentieth century moral imperatives and empirical evidence lead to a growing consensus that inclusion was ‘an appropriate philosophy and a relevant framework for restructuring education’ (Thomas et al. 1998, p4).

This worldwide interest to promote more inclusive forms of education was soon supported by international agreements, legislation and government policies (Griffin and Shevlin 2007), which has led to an escalation of interest in special education policy and practice within education generally and more specifically PE (Haycock and Smith 2010).

Ireland endorsed the international shift to change the face of special education and a number of policy documents and legislative acts have aided in creating more inclusive forms of education over the past 20 years.

A major catalyst to a number of key developments in legislation and policy for special education in Ireland was a parental litigation case known as The O’Donoghue case, in May of 1992. A landmark ruling in this case in 1993, stated that Paul O’Donoghue was denied his constitutional right to a ‘free primary education’ as a result of his disability and this acted as a major incentive to progressing special education entitlements in Ireland, and more specifically legislative developments to cement the right to education for all (Meegan and Mac Phail 2006a). The Special Education Review Committee (SERC), which had been established in 1991 by the Minister for Education, released a report in 1993, subsequent to the O Donoghue case, which represented the earliest efforts to address existing educational provision for children with special needs (Griffin and Shevlin, 2007). The SERC report (1993) stated that it favoured ‘*as much integration as is appropriate and feasible with as little segregation as is necessary*’

(Department of Education 1993a, p. 22) while also advocating for a continuum of provision for a continuum of needs, with special schools seen as a necessity for some children. There has been a gradual transition toward creating more inclusive education strategies for children with SEN since the publication of this SERC report (Meegan and MacPhail 2006a). The Education Act (Ireland, 1998) was signed into Irish law in December 1998 and made specific reference to the provision of education for “*all children including those with disabilities or other special educational needs*” and the right of “*automatic entitlement*” of provision in education (Griffin and Shelvin 2007 p. 45). This Act meant that all teachers and all schools had to now take responsibility for all children. The National Educational Psychology Service (NEPS) was also established in 1998 and aimed to assess the needs of students and assist in the production of an individual education plan (IEP).

From 1998 onward, a number of significant policy and legislation developments took place in Ireland, which contributed towards the move to inclusion for all children. The Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act in 2004 (Government of Ireland, 2004) built on previous legislation such as the Education Act 1998. According to this Act, special educational needs refers to:

a restriction in the capacity of the person to participate in and benefit from education on account of an enduring physical, sensory, mental health or learning disability or any other condition which results in a person learning differently from a person without that condition....

(EPSEN Act 2004, p. 6.)

This enabling Act represented a significant shift from government policy towards the creation of inclusive learning environments and is responsible for putting local support structures into place to deliver special education provisions (Griffin and Shevlin 2007). The key message of this Act was as follows:

“A child with special educational needs shall be educated in an inclusive environment with children who do not have such needs unless the nature or degree of those needs of the child is such that to do so would be inconsistent with—

(a) the best interests of the child as determined in accordance with any assessment carried out under this Act, or

(b) the effective provision of education for children with whom the child is to be educated.”

(EPSEN Act 2004, p7)

The Act was designed to make detailed provision which would ensure the education of persons who have SEN be guaranteed as a right enforceable in law (NCSE 2004). Regrettably, due to economic circumstances, the EPSEN Act (2004) has not been fully implemented. Although the right to be educated in an inclusive manner and the duties of the school to provide for such have been established, many other aspects of the Act have not been implemented such as statutory rights for assessment, individual education plans and appeals (NCSE, 2011). Additionally it is often argued that although the right to be educated in an “inclusive” environment has been enforced, the resources to allow for this to truly happen are often not granted. This may be attributed to a categorical statement in the Disability Act of 2005, relating to provisions being made within the constraints of “resources available and their obligations in relation to their allocation” (Government of Ireland,

2005, p.5.), which undoubtedly presents an *“unambiguous potential opt-out clause”* for the State in relation to the implementation of necessary support structures for special education provision (Megan and MacPhail 2006a, p.60). Consequently lack of available funding and resources have consistently been cited as legitimate reasons for not providing adequate education services to children with special education needs.

A notable outcome of the EPSEN Act 2004 was the NCSE, a council which amongst other functions, such as research and planning, is responsible for allocating additional teaching and other resources to support the educational needs of children with disabilities (NCSE, 2010). One such supporting resource is that of the Special Needs Assistant (SNA). SNA's are allocated to schools primarily to assist teachers in providing care support for students with disabilities who have additional care needs in order to facilitate their educational placements (DES, 2002). The duties of SNA's have been extended beyond this in more recent circulars with additional duties to include participation with *“school development planning, engagement with parents and other duties appropriate to the grade as determined by the needs of the students and school from time to time”* (DES, 2011, p.24). It is evident from the literature that SNAs have become the primary method for allowing inclusion of students with SEN into mainstream schools (Elliott, 2004; Logan, 2006; Takala, 2007) and have *“contributed significantly to the enhancement of students' experiences in school”* (DES 2011 p?). Despite the roles envisaged by the Department of Education curriculars for SNAs, research unanimously identified a discrepancy between the officially prescribed role of the SNA and the actual practice in schools (Lawlor and Cregan, 2003; Logan 2006; O'Neill and Rose, 2008).

Within the Irish context the focus on the preparation of students for state exams presents some unique challenges in relation to the inclusion of students with SEN. In response to this challenge, in 2007 the DES published its Post Primary Guidelines for Inclusion, which advocates a whole-school approach to inclusion and outlines practical guidelines on roles, responsibilities and collaboration for inclusion as well as best practice strategies at the level of the classroom for individual students (Winter and O'Raw, 2010).

As outlined, Ireland has gone through a radical change towards an inclusive education system from what was once complete segregation of students with SEN. While many barriers and challenges still remain in the move to inclusion, it is important to realize that significant progress has been made. Evidence of this can be seen through a comparison of the statistic that in 1989 all children with mild general learning disabilities attended either a special school or special class, whereas in 2007 this number had decreased to 36% of children (Stevens and O'Moore 2009).

2.1.7 Special Educational Needs

Definition

The term Special Educational Need (SEN) was first introduced within an Irish context as a result of the investigation of the Special Education Review Committee into special educational provision in Ireland (SERC: Department of Education and Skills [formerly Education and Science]: DES, 1993) coupled with the international move towards identifying children who required more support in school to have the

same opportunities as their peers who did not have such needs. Within the report by the SERC (1993) students with special educational needs were defined as

“all those whose disabilities and /or circumstances prevent or hinder them from benefiting adequately from the education which is normally provided for pupils of the same age, or for whom the education which can generally be provided in the ordinary classroom is not sufficiently challenging.”

(Special Education Review Committee, 1993, p.19)

It was further stated within this report that *“Such pupils have additional educational requirements and need some form of extra assistance to enable them to make progress in accordance with their ability.”* (Government of Ireland 1993 p.19)

Since then the term has been defined in many different ways in Irish policy and legislation.

In 1998 the Education Act was enacted (Government of Ireland, 1998) and offered a new definition of special educational needs, as *‘the educational needs of students who have a disability and the educational needs of exceptionally able students’* (Government of Ireland, 1998 p. 8). This represented a much narrower and more restrictive understanding of SEN than that offered by the report of the Special Education Review Committee (Government of Ireland, 1993) and placed a much greater emphasis on disability. The overall effect of this more restricted definition was to exclude children, particularly those with adverse social, emotional or material circumstances, from the category of children with SEN and from the provisions of the act which safeguarded their rights (MacGiolla Phádraig 2007).

The Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004 (Government of Ireland, 2004) further restricted the understanding of SEN by focusing exclusively on disability as the basis of special needs and this definition essentially

moved Ireland from a broad comprehensive understanding of SEN to a disability-focused one (MacGiolla Phádraig 2007).

For the purpose of this research the definition used is from the Education for Persons with a Special Educational Need Act 2004, which defines SEN as relating to:

“a restriction in the capacity of the person to participate in and benefit from education on account of an enduring physical, sensory, mental health or learning disability, or any other condition which results in a person learning differently from a person without that condition and cognate words shall be construed accordingly”

(EPSEN Act, Government of Ireland, 2004, p6).

Population Statistics

The Census of Population has been the main source of statistics on people with disabilities in Ireland. In 2006, questions on disability were broadened and shifted to emphasize the day-to-day implications of having a disability rather than trying to identify and categorize that disability. Figures show that persons with disabilities represent 9.3 per cent of the total population in 2006 (CSO, 2007) with this figure increasing to 13% in the next population census in 2011. Looking specifically at children with disabilities, it was found that there were 47,604 children (0-19 years) with disabilities in 2006 and 75,770 children (0-19 years) in 2011 but it is important to note that depending on the definition of disability adopted, this statistic has been shown to vary, for example from 3.2 per cent of the population of children having a disability in the Census of Population (2006) to 11 per cent in the National Disability Survey (2008).

When looking specifically at education there are only a small number of existing data sources in Ireland which supply data that can be linked to the EPSEN Act definition of SEN, these include the NCSE studies in 2006 and 2011. Due to this variation in definitions of SEN being used, existing data can show wide

discrepancies in figures for children with SEN in the Irish Education System. The NCSE carried out research in 2006 which put the entire number of children with SEN at 190,303, equivalent to 17.7 per cent of all children. The report considered the estimate was 'as reliable a guide' of the number of children with SEN as was possible to obtain at that time (NCSE 2006, p.73) but provided a much higher estimate of need than had ever been considered before and brings attention to the variability that potentially exists in defining SEN and disabilities in general for statistical purposes. The impact of the variance in the use of definitions of SEN and disability on the prevalence rates presented by different sources can be seen clearly in the summary table 2.1 below, taken from the NCSE (2011) publication:

Table 2.1 Summary Table of prevalence rates of disability from different sources (NCSE 2011)

Data Source	Category of SEN	Type of Data	Estimate
Census of Population 2006	Disability generally	Census Data	3 per cent (of children)
National Disability Survey 2008	Disability generally	Survey Data	11 per cent (of children)
National Intellectual Disability Database 2009	Mild GLD/moderate GLD/profound GLD	National database	7 per cent (of children)
National Physical and Sensory Disability Database 2009	Physical disability, hearing impairment, visual impairment, specific speech and language disorder	National database	7 per cent (of children)
National Council for Special Education SEAS data 2010	DES categorical system	Administrative data	4 per cent (of primary and post primary population)

This is a clear barrier to presenting clarification on the prevalence of SEN however, regardless of the definition used for data collection purposes, it is evident that the population of children with SEN is increasing steadily. From 2011/2012 to 2015/2016 the number of students with SEN has increased by 28% from 141,919 to 181,218. Over the same period the total student population in primary and post-primary increased by 7% from 838,977 to 899,106 meaning that the number of students with SEN relative to the total student population has increased from 17% to 20% (Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Services 2016 p.15).

When looking specifically at mainstream education, as this research does, increases in students with SEN can also be seen with about 34,140 students in mainstream primary and post primary schools in 2009/10 receiving additional teaching support and an increase to over 39,000 in 2012/13. In post primary mainstream schools alone, the figures from 2009/10 for children with SEN stood at 17,512. The most recent figures released are suggesting a further increase to over 42,000 students (NCSE, 2014) with SEN in mainstream post primary and primary schools. The table 4.2 below shows the breakdown of SEN by categories in mainstream education in 2009/10 (NCSE 2011).

Table 4.2 Number of students with SEN in mainstream primary and post primary schools 2009/10.

SEN Type	Post Primary	Primary	Total
Assessed Syndrome	88	253	341
Autism Spectrum Disorder	1090	2953	4043
Borderline mild general learning disability	3689		3689
Emotional/behavioral disturbances	2054	3730	5784
Hearing Impairment	325	649	974
Mild general learning disability	3611		3611
Moderate general learning disability	244	511	755
Multiple disabilities	510	1429	1939
Physical disabilities	1394	2757	4151

Severe emotional/behavioral disturbance	390	726	1116
Severe/profound general learning disability	31	24	55
Specific learning disability	3417		3417
Specific speech and language disorder	493	3314	3807
Visual impairment	176	283	459
Total	17512	16629	34141

(NCSE 2011)

2.1.8 Support Structures for Inclusive Education

As outlined above, the NCSE and DES allocate numerous support structures and resources for students with SEN and the allocation of these supports are determined by SENO. Within schools themselves, support for students with SEN in primary and post primary schools is generally coordinated by an individual allocated this responsibility. The title of SEN co-ordinator (SENCo) is frequently used to describe an individual with such management responsibilities, despite the lack of official designation of such a title within Irish legislation (Rose et al., 2015).

This section will summarize the main support structures and resources in place for students with SEN in Ireland, detailing how the resources are allocated to schools and how the supports are implemented in schools.

Allocation of Resources

During the course of this research the system for the delivery of resources to support students with SEN has undergone changes, including how they are allocated at post primary level. The section below will present the context for these changes. It is important to state that data collection for this current research occurred during the academic year 2014/15 therefore it is necessary to understand both the system for allocating resources at that time, along with the allocation model which is currently in place for academic year 2017/18.

A system for allocating additional teaching resources to schools was originally implemented in 1999 (Circular 08/99). This system allocated varying levels of resource teaching hours to schools to support individual students with assessed SEN. The scheme was reviewed and revised in 2002 and 2003 through Circulars 08/02 and 24/03. Under the terms of these circulars, students with assessed learning disabilities in ordinary classes in mainstream schools were allocated resource teaching support in accordance with the level of support applicable for

that category of disability. Special Education Circular 02/05 introduced a General Allocation Model (GAM) for all mainstream schools. This provided a generalised system of allocation of supports, for students with learning support needs, and for students with certain categories of high incidence SEN, as defined by Circular 02/05. Schools who had enrolled students with Low Incidence SEN (as defined by Circular 02/05), continued to receive such allocations from the NCSE in addition to their GAM allocations (DES 2017).

In May 2012, the system changed slightly to allow post primary schools to be granted an allocation for students with high incidence disabilities at 95 per cent of the hours allocated the previous December, which removed the need for individual assessments for new students. For post primary students with other learning support needs, a new general allocation of learning support was introduced the same year whereby schools are allocated a fixed support teaching resource based on the size of school (under 600 students = 0.9 post; 600+ students = 1.4 post) (Rose et al 2015 p.15). General Allocation Model allocations were, since the 2012/13 school year, subsequently updated annually for schools as part of the staffing arrangements for each school year (DES 2017).

At the time this research was conducted, between 2012 and 2017, resource hours were assigned on the basis of category of disability/special educational need using the fourteen categories of disability/SEN recognized by the DES for support provision: physical disability, hearing impairment, visual impairment, emotional disturbance, severe emotional disturbance, moderate general learning disability, severe/profound general learning disability, autistic spectrum disorders, assessed syndrome along with one of the above disabilities, specific speech and language disorder, multiple disabilities, specific learning disability (high incidence), mild general learning disability (high incidence), borderline mild general learning disability (high incidence) (Rose et al 2015) .

In 2013, the NCSE concluded that the 'current support allocation model does not provide all children with equitable access to educational supports' (NCSE, 2013, p5) and suggested "the diagnosis of disability should not be the prerequisite

determinant for the allocation of additional resources for students with SEN. They should instead be based on an assessment of student needs' (NCSE, 2013, p5). A particular emphasis within this report was that student support needs within a particular category of disability may vary widely; yet the current system allocates the same support level to each child within the particular disability category regardless of whether they actually need more or less than the allocated support (Rose et al 2015). Based on these findings, the NCSE working group (2014) recommended that a new allocation model was required.

This new allocation model came into effect in academic year 2017/18 with Circular No 0014/2017 replacing DES Circulars SP Ed 08/1999, 08/2002, 24/2003, 02/2005, 30/2011, 10/2012 and 70/2014 (DES 2017).

The new Special Education Teaching allocation (Circular 0014/2017) provides a single unified allocation for special educational support teaching needs to each school, based on that school's educational profile. This single allocation is made to allow schools to provide additional teaching support for all students who require such support in their schools.

The allocation of additional teaching supports to schools is based on a school's educational profile, comprised of two components:

- Baseline component provided to every mainstream school to support inclusion, assistance with learning difficulties and early intervention,
and
- A school educational profile component, which takes into account:
 - The number of students with complex needs enrolled to the school.
 - The learning support needs of students as evidenced by standardised test results.

- The social context of the school including disadvantage and gender

Schools deploy resources based on each student's individual learning needs. The new allocation model ensures that schools have greater certainty as to the resources that will be available to them to provide additional teaching to support the inclusion of students with SEN on an ongoing basis (DES 2017).

Additional Teaching Support

Although section 22 (1) of the Education Act 1998 states that the classroom teacher is responsible for educating all students in his/her class, it is acknowledged that students with SEN may require additional teaching support in schools,. This support is provided for through the allocation of resources as outlined above.

In such circumstances, the classroom teacher will be supported by Special Educational Needs Teachers, previously referred to as resource teachers or learning support teachers, who will have access to additional training in the area of special education. These teachers will work closely with the class teacher to provide additional teaching support for children with SEN (DES 2017).

DES Circular 0013/2017 outlines that such additional teaching support can be provided in a variety of ways and it is at the discretion of the class teacher, the special education teacher and the school to decide the most appropriate methods of support to employ. For example the special education teacher might work in the classroom with the class teacher or withdraw students in small groups and/or individually for a period of time (depending upon the nature of students needs) for intensive teaching of key skills.

There have been some examples of collaborative planning between special education needs teachers and classroom/subject teachers, leading to team teaching in the classroom emerging in Ireland (Farrell and O'Neill, 2012). However, withdrawal from the class by the specialist teachers for individual and/or small group support has been identified as the main model of intervention by resource

teachers in Ireland (Travers et al, 2010), with special classes/units also being increasingly used by schools as a method of inclusion (Banks and McCoy 2018).

Special Classes

As part of the continuum of educational provision available to students with SEN, special class placement within mainstream schools is a placement option. In Ireland, the concept of a special class is difficult to define specifically, as interpretation and practice vary across schools (McCoy et al. 2014). Special classes may be sanctioned by the SENO or DES to cater specifically for particular SENs in a school but special classes can also evolve from the pooling of teaching resources in a school at the schools own discretion. In Ireland, the majority of special classes or units are intended to cater solely for students with SEN and most special classes allow only students from a specific category of need (Ware et al, 2009).

McCoy et al. (2014) conducted a national survey in 2011 to explore the number of formal special classes established by the NCSE and the number of informal classes formed through the pooling of resource teaching hours. The survey showed that a substantial number of special classes had been established in primary (n=357) and post primary (n=302) schools at that time. Additionally it was found that more than half of the classes were established informally at post primary, while this figure was less than 10 per cent at primary (McCoy et al. 2014). According to data collected by the NCSE (2016) a dramatic increase in the number of special classes has occurred in the past five years, with the number doubling from their count of 548 special classes in 2011/12 to 1,008 in 2015/16 (IGEES, 2016). McCoy et al (2014) further disclosed that the majority of special classes were designated as ASD classes or units, sixty per cent at primary level and less than one-fifth at post primary level (McCoy et al. 2014).

Whilst mobility into mainstream classes from such special classes can occur; the survey by McCoy et al (2014) revealed that across special classes at both primary and post-primary, many students spend most, if not all, of the school week together as a group. For example, at post-primary, 31 per cent of students in special classes spend most of their week together and a further 24 per cent spend all their week together (McCoy et al. 2014). This raises the issue of whether special class provision is actually achieving inclusive education.

Whether or not to provide for students in special classes or mainstream provision is a highly contested subject (Norwich, 2008; Banks and McCoy 2014). Some believe that special classes go against the principle of inclusive education by segregating students from their peers while others argue that such classes offer opportunities for students with SEN to attend mainstream schools who would otherwise be in special schools (McCoy et al. 2014). In light of this it is progressively becoming accepted that the term inclusion be reserved for educational settings where students with SEN take part in the majority of the curriculum in the mainstream class alongside students without SEN (Pijl, Meijer and Hegarty, 1997).

With regard to the attainment of students with SEN in special or mainstream classes, studies have found that students with SEN in special classes did not achieve better results than those placed in ordinary classes (Hegarty 1993; Jenkinson 1997). However some have argued that the benefits for students with SEN attending special classes go beyond the appropriateness of the curriculum, rather it has an impact on the students in relation to increasing confidence and self-esteem (Jenkinson 1997) and acting as a safety valve for schools looking to manage additional demands rather than as a preferred place of learning for students with SEN (Sorrells et al., 2004). Additionally for students with severe disabilities a special class may be the only feasible option due to the range of additional needs which a mainstream teacher may not be able to accommodate in one class and due to the need for some students to be taught things that other don't need (Kauffman and Hallinan 2005).

Conversely further studies have stated that the “internal segregation” of special classes have the opposite effect and can undermine the self-esteem of students who are perceived to be lacking in sufficient abilities to take part in the main classroom (Crockett et al 2007; Dyson 2007; Tankersley et al 2007).

The issue of special classes therefore remains debated and perhaps as suggested by Banks and McCoy (2017) they are “simply ‘an Irish solution’ to inclusive education which have the appearance of inclusion but are in fact side stepping the issue” (Banks and McCoy 2017 p.458).

It has been suggested therefore that the most favorable approach would seem to be what has been described as ‘resourced mainstream provision’ (including team teaching, the use of non-teaching resources, such as a SNAs, as well as additional teaching hours outside the mainstream class), which offers clear advantages to students with SEN over fulltime placement in special schools or special classes (McCoy et al 2014; Ofsted, 2006; Myklebust, 2006).

Special Needs Assistant

One aspect of ‘resourced mainstream provision’ as referred to above is the use of Special Needs Assistants (SNAs). It is recognized that some students with SEN will require supports other than additional teaching in order to be included in education, such as for example support with care needs. SNAs are allocated to primary, post primary and special schools to address such care needs of students with SEN. Schools apply to the local SENO to obtain SNA support for a particular student and these applications are considered by the SENO within the parameters of DES policy and school capacity to meet specified care needs (Rose et al. 2015).

There has been an enormous increase over the past decade in SNA support being allocated to students with SEN, with the number of students accessing SNA support rising from 22,284 students in 2011 to 34,670 in 2017 (NCSE 2018).

In the past number of years, concerns have been expressed that supporting children with significant care needs – the original purpose for SNA deployment –

had been altered in practice in schools (DES, 2011). According to the Value for Money Evaluation conducted by the DES in 2011, SNA work now included involvement in pedagogical/ teaching roles, behavioral and therapeutic issues and administrative duties. A recent DES Circular (0030/2014) was published which clarified and restated the purpose of the SNA scheme as a result of the concerns being raised in the DES 2011 paper, with the circular clearly stating the function of the SNA is to 'provide schools with additional adult support staff who can assist children with SEN who also have additional and significant care needs' (DES, 2014, p.1). As a result of growing concern over the SNA scheme, a comprehensive review of the scheme was recommended by the NCSE and was published in May 2018.

The role of the SNA will be discussed in greater detail in section 2.4.3 of this Literature Review.

Individual Education Plan (IEP)

One of the most internationally recognised ways of supporting students with SEN is the development of an Individual Education Plan (IEP). These plans allow the specific learning needs of individuals with SEN to be documented and effective responses to be planned (Rose et al 2015). Individual planning in this way allows teachers to make the required curricular adaptations to ensure that the students with SEN get access to learning alongside their peers (Ryndak, 1996; Loreman, Deppeler & Harvey, 2010). In Ireland, legislation has been ratified to support this process and ensure that IEPs are implemented for students with SEN. However due to economic constraints this section of the EPSEN Act 2004 has yet to be enacted fully. Consequently, research has indicated that the lack of clarity and guidance around the IEP status has led to confusion and inconsistent practice by schools (Rose et al., 2015). Griffin and Shevlin (2007) identified an exception to this whereby a number of special schools have established IEPs as a core element of their provision for students with SEN over time.

Support for schools to develop IEPs is available through the Guidelines on Individual Education Plan Process (NCSE, 2006) and the Special Education Support Service (SESS), but research into the development and deployment of IEPs in an Irish context is limited in scope and quantity (Rose et al 2015; Ring & Travers, 2005; Nugent, 2002).

2.1.9 Interpretations of Inclusion

Defining Inclusion

“While inclusion, as a concept, has achieved international prominence, it is generally recognised that the term has no single agreed definition” (Rose et al 2015 p. 22).

In 1998, Florian suggested that while there were many definitions of inclusion put forward in multiple contexts, no single definition had been universally accepted. Twenty years on from this assertion, a single definition is still elusive, which reflects the complex nature of inclusion locally, nationally, and internationally (Winter and O’Raw 2010).

Some of the definitions which are most visible in international literature on inclusion include those of Stainback and Stainback 1990, Sebba and Sachdev 1997, Booth and Ainscow 2002, UNESCO 2005 and Winter and O’Raw 2010.

Sebba and Sachdev take a the view that inclusive education is

“a process involving changes in the way schools are organised, in the curriculum and in teaching strategies, to accommodate the range of needs and abilities among pupils. Through this process, the school builds its capacity to accept all pupils from the local community who wish to attend and, in so doing, reduces the need to exclude pupils.”

(Sebba and Sachdev, 1997, p.2).

This definition perhaps focuses more on the practical aspects of inclusion, ensuring that students with a range of needs are physically accepted into schools but with no mention of the philosophy of inclusion and need to change cultures and attitudes to allow all students to feel included.

Block (1999) asserts the importance of ensuring that inclusion as a philosophy goes beyond simply physically placing a child in a general education classroom and favours a definition of inclusion as used by Stainback and Stainback (1990):

“An inclusive school is a place where everyone belongs is accepted supports and is supported by his/her peers and other members of the school community in the course of having his/her educational needs met”

(Stainback and Stainback 1990 p3)

Similarly within Booth and Ainscow's (2002) definition the emphasis moves from minimizing a disability to maximising potential and participation *“increasing the participation of students in, and reducing their exclusion from, the cultures, curricula and communities of local schools”* (Booth and Ainscow 2002 p3).

In 2005 UNESCO provided a more comprehensive definition of inclusion which encompassed both the philosophical and practical aspects while also ensuring that the diversity of all needs of learners were accounted for:

“Inclusion is seen as a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures, and communities, and reducing exclusion within and from education. ... [As such,] it involves a range of changes and modifications in content, approaches, structures and strategies, with a common vision which covers all children of the appropriate age range and a conviction that it is the responsibility of the regular system to educate all children”

(UNESCO, 2005, p.13).

It has been suggested that the meaning of inclusion may be largely contextual and thus will take different forms depending on the environment, which would account for the variations in definition across stakeholders (Florian, 2005). Therefore according to the perspective of the individual or groups concerned, the demands for inclusive education will be different and thus inclusion will never look the same in every school (Winter and O’Raw 2010).

Within the Irish Education context, although the EPSEN Act (2004) clearly promotes the concept of an inclusive learning environment, it provides no actual definition of inclusion (Rose, Winter, Shevlin and O’Raw 2015). In 2008 the NCSE requested that the consultative Forum would provide advice on what constitutes inclusive education as defined in the EPSEN Act 2004. The consultative forum decided on the following definition within an Irish context:

“Inclusion is defined as a process of:

Addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of learners through enabling participation in learning, cultures, and communities.

Removing barriers to education through the accommodation and provision of appropriate structures and arrangements, to enable each learner to achieve the maximum benefit from his/her attendance at school.”

(Winter & O’Raw, 2010, p39).

For the purpose of this research therefore, the definition of inclusion as outlined by Winter and O’Raw (2010) is the definition which is employed.

Inclusion V Integration

Previous concepts of educating children with SEN in a mainstream environment were fundamentally concerned with ‘going to school’ (Miles 2000, p1), a view which is reflective of integrated education. Inclusive education on the other hand, is about ‘participating in school’ (Miles 2000, p1).

The emphasis in the integration movement was on providing supports to individual students to enable them to 'fit in' to the mainstream programme. The notion of inclusion replaced the term integration from the 1980s onwards (Winter and O'Raw 2010).

Essentially, integrated education followed the medical model of disability, which saw the child/students as the problem which needed resources, assistance or rehabilitation to "fit in" to the school system. Inclusive education on the other hand is more in line with the social model of disability, whereby it is the school/education system which is seen as the problem and therefore the school and the education system as a whole needs to change in order to meet the individual needs of all learners (Miles 2000).

The term 'inclusion' moves the focus from the child to the school. Inclusion is used to describe the extent to which a student with SEN is involved as a full member of the school community, participating in all aspects of education, unlike integration, which does not specify what should be done, merely that all students should be permitted access to the school (O' Riordan, 2017; Winter and O'Raw, 2010).

As Farrell and Ainscow (2002) state, the issue with defining inclusion solely in terms of placement is that it does not tell us anything about the quality of the education received. In contrast, inclusion is about the student's right to participate fully in school life and the school's duty to welcome and accept them (British Psychological Society, 2002). In short it is important that inclusion is viewed as "More than a place" (Ryan 2009 p77) and more than merely a geographical question.

Inclusion V Full Inclusion

A continuum of inclusion provision currently exists in Ireland to serve students with SEN, which stretches from full-time enrolment in mainstream classes to full-time enrolment in special schools with a range of options in between including special classes and mainstream classes with additional support in class (NCSE 2011). Offering this range of options for inclusion provision presents a debate around the difference between inclusion and full inclusion (Winter and O'Raw 2010).

Sapon-Shevin (2000/2001) claims,

'[w]hile placement options such as special classes or schools exist, educators will not have to address the restructuring of the system to meet the needs of all children. Where alternate placements are maintained, students who challenge the existing system or who do not 'fit in' are simply removed from the mainstream, placed elsewhere, and the system does not have to change'

(Sapon-Shevin 2000/2001, p.38).

Rather therefore it is argued by some advocates of inclusion (Putnam 1990; Sapon-Shevin 2000; Stainback and Stainback 1995) that full inclusion should take precedence over inclusion. To clarify the difference between inclusion and full inclusion Rogers (1993 p. 1-2), provided the following definitions;

Inclusion: This term is used to refer to the commitment to educate each child, to the maximum extent appropriate, in the school and classroom he or she would otherwise attend. It involves bringing the support services to the child (rather than moving the child to the services) and requires only that the child will benefit from being in the class (rather than having to keep up with the other students)

Full Inclusion: This term is primarily used to refer to the belief that instructional practices and technological supports are presently available to accommodate all

students in the schools and classrooms they would otherwise attend if not disabled. (Rogers 1993 p 1-2)

In other words, advocates of full inclusion would believe that students should not be removed from mainstream classrooms to receive assistance but rather assistance should be brought to them in the mainstream class or mainstream class teachers should be adequately trained to meet all student's needs.

Conversely, some believe that students should always begin in the mainstream environment and be removed only when the necessary services cannot be offered in the regular classroom (Winter and O'Raw, 2010). While Bowe (2005) maintains that inclusion, but not always full inclusion, is a realistic approach for most students with special needs he warns that for some students with more severe needs, even regular inclusion may not offer an appropriate education.

In this regard it has been argued by Kauffman (1989) that it is just as discriminatory to try to force all students into the inclusion mould as it is to try to force all students into the mould of special education.

Similarly Gains (2008; 2000) asserts that 'responsible inclusion' should be practiced which advocates a flexible approach with a range of alternatives for students rather than applying a concept of inclusion which is a one size fits all model (Winter and O'Raw 2010).

Role of Special Education

While the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO 1994) advocated inclusion in mainstream education for the majority of children, it did declare that the proposed 'schools for all' approach might not be effective for a minority of students (Winter and O'Raw 2010). In light of this and with researchers including Gains (2008) advocating for a continuum of inclusion in education; a role for special education schools within the education system in Ireland remains.

There are 105 special schools in Ireland for children with SEN arising from a disability (Source: DES 2010). In addition to these 105 schools, the DES has recently granted recognition to thirteen special schools for children with Autism, which were previously part of the Applied Behavioural Analysis (ABA) pilot scheme funded by the DES. According to NCSE figures, approximately 6,340 children attend special schools (primary and post-primary) for children with disabilities. Approximately 3,000 students are enrolled in special classes for children with SEN arising from a disability, of which approximately 2,630 children are at primary level and 369 students are at post-primary level (NCSE, 2010)

The EPSEN Act (2004) (section 2) states that students with SEN shall be educated in an inclusive environment with other children who do not have such needs unless to do so would be inconsistent with the best interests of the child or the effective provision of education for the other children with whom the child is to be educated. This commitment to an inclusive education, as stated in the Act, is in harmony with international agreements such as the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994), the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN, 1990) and the United Nations International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) (NCSE 2011). In line with this, the NCSE is obliged to guarantee that a continuum of special educational provision is available as required in relation to each type of disability (NCSE 2011). This provision therefore includes the availability of special schools, which have been stated to play an important part of the continuum of educational provision for students with SEN, in particular for students with complex and severe needs (Ware et al., 2009). Additionally research has indicated a pattern of students with MGLD, and often associated complex and/or behavioral needs, frequently transfer to special schools at post primary stage (Ware et al., 2009). It is believed that this occurs only when significant structural and curricular gaps were evident in many post-primary schools and findings indicate that special schools catering for such students are providing a valuable alternative to mainstream post primary schools for such students (Ware et al., 2009).

Much debate endures around the role of the special schools or indeed, the very existence of special schools, and such discussions are often loaded with emotion. Two opposing values appear to guide the tensions on this topic; educational experiences tailored to meet the individual needs of students on the one hand and the acknowledgement of the importance of instilling a sense of belonging on the other (Norwich 2008).

It has been contended by Ainscow (1997) that the focus on inclusion is often debated on the grounds of a rights-based agenda, rather than a needs-based agenda which suggests it is ideologically grounded rather pragmatically so. As a result tensions often become evident once the ideals of inclusion practices and placements are “set against the realities of limited teacher skills, exclusionary pressures in schools and, above all, substantive differences between learners” (Dyson, 2001, p.27).

There is a dearth of evidence regarding the effectiveness of the mainstream schooling versus special schooling in terms of learning outcomes (Porter et al, 2002) predominantly due to inherent methodological issues with measuring attainment of students between the two educational settings (Ware et al 2009). Nevertheless some research has been conducted which has indicated that little to no difference is apparent in the quality of provision and outcomes for students across primary and post-primary mainstream schools and special schools (Ofsted 2006). In other words, students were as likely to make good progress with their academic, personal and social development in both mainstream and special schools. Furthermore research by Myklebust (2006) has indicated that resourced mainstream provision offers certain advantages to students with SEN over and above full-time placement in special school or class provision.

These findings mainly focused on educational attainment however, whilst an examination of parents of students with SEN views would appear to indicate that they were more satisfied with their child's education when they were attending special schools (Nugent 2007). However. Nugent continued by stating that “parents

generally regard their child's happiness as the primary measure of success, and place less emphasis on educational outcomes" (Nugent, 2007, p.53).

In general it would appear that the role of the special school is somewhat dependent on the limitation of mainstream education provision (Ware et al 2009), a consensus which was reflected by 67.1% of special school principals in research conducted by Dempsey (2005). Perhaps this is unsurprising when it is considered that children were sent to special schools "at a time when it seemed impossible for regular schools to meet their needs" (Mittler 2003 p5) therefore it is arguable that the role of the special school has always been limited by what is going on (or not) in mainstream education (Ware et al 2009). In light of this it has been suggested that "special schools and inclusion should be two sides of the same coin, each complementing the other in meeting and supporting the special educational needs of the most vulnerable children and young people in our schools" (Baker 2007 p.76).

In recent years, it has become clear that some special schools and mainstream schools in Ireland have developed links (Shevlin, 1999; Buckley, 2000; Walsh and de Paor, 2000; de Paor, 2007). A research study by Buckley (2000) indicated that the most common types of links between the schools were exchange of students in both directions (47%), staff, material resources and students moving in both directions (21%) and students going from the mainstream to the special school only (19%). Such links between mainstream and special schools have been signposted as being crucial to the future role of special schools with Norwich (2008) extending this concept to say that schools that are not linked to mainstream schools cannot be included in a "flexible interacting continua of provision ... as these do not represent a balance between common and separate provision" (p.141). Further suggestions have been made with regard to the potential role of the special school as a centre of excellence for special education for mainstream schools and teachers (Ware et al 2009).

In conclusion, findings from research and policy advice suggest two clear reasons why special schools need to be retained into the future: *"provision for pupils with*

significant and complex needs and collaboration with and/or provision of support and advice to mainstream schools” (Ware et al., 2009 p36).

2.1.10 Contradictions, Challenges and Complexities of Inclusion

In a society, which is faced with the challenge of becoming truly inclusive, education has an intrinsic role to play to ensure that this challenge is seen not as an obstacle, but as an opportunity. As summarized by Tormey (2003, p.1) “Education is either part of the solution or part of the problem”.

The underlining ideal in inclusion is that all children have the right to be educated together regardless of any special needs but it is a complex, multifaceted concept which has generated much debate in education (Henry et al 2008). Casserly, Coady and Marshall 2008).

It is important to note that although significant barriers to inclusion still exist in the Irish education system, Ireland has undergone radical changes in relation to inclusive education over the past two decades. For example, in 1989, all children with Mild General Learning Disabilities attended either a special school or a special class; by 2007 this number had decreased to 36% (Stevens and O’Moore, 2009). While this statistic indicates a major shift towards an inclusive education system in Ireland, questions must be asked regarding whether this merely suggests that inclusion is about location (O’ Riordan 2017).

Of course inclusion must be viewed as “more than a place” (Ryan 2009, p.77) and rather than focusing on the location of the students we should shift our attention to how best to meet the needs of all students (King 2006). Viewing inclusion in this philosophical way brings our attention to ensuring the best possible holistic education for the student and assuring that all students feel they belong (Warnock and Norwich, 2010). However it is this very ideology of inclusion which raises

emotive and social rights issues (Meegan and MacPhail 2006a) leading to considerable debate about whether this ideal is achievable, how it can be achieved and the extent to which this involves the deconstruction of the field of SEN (Norwich, 2002).

The cause of much of the debate lies in the barriers which are perceived by the stakeholders involved, such as the school staff, parents, students with SEN and academics. These barriers and challenges will be outlined in this section from the perception of the stakeholders mentioned above and under the headings of; Labels/disability types; Enrollment policies, Limited Resources, Human Rights, Academic Pursuits, Teaching Expertise and Training, Teacher Attitudes, Time, Social Emotional and Behavioural Factors.

Labels/disability Types

Winter and O' Raw (2010) make the point that on the one hand, we are encouraged to work towards 'inclusion' while on the other, the language of SEN, rooted in the medical model of disability, legitimises the idea that some children are 'normal' while others are 'special'. The contradiction here is evident whereby although the labels used within SEN appear to negate the notion of inclusion, the reality is that labels and categories are still needed to allow a system for securing resources and extra provision. Ainscow et al. (2006, p.17) take the view that, 'categorisation processes, and the practices and language associated with them, act as barriers to the development of a broader view of inclusion'. According to research, once a student has acquired a certain type of reputation from an early age they are still perceived as being 'labelled' in a persistent way throughout their school years (MacLure, Jones, Holmes and MacRae, 2011). Due to the fact that labels operate from the perspective of the child's weaknesses as opposed to their strengths, they can lead to assumptions about the capabilities and capacities of children to learn, potentially resulting in children being defined by their label and not their individual characteristics (Scanlon, 2013).

In addition to the issues surrounding labelling and categorization, a significant challenge appears to be prominent in providing equal inclusion for all types of SEN. In particular the literature indicates that students with challenging behavior and social, emotional and behavioural difficulties are among the most frequently segregated students (Shevlin, Winter and Flynn 2013). Teachers have reported that support systems for such behavioural difficulties are inadequate and too slow and as such with such difficulties reportedly being on the increase in relation to severity, complexity and prevalence; many schools are forced to resort to exclusionary practices towards these students. Such practices are often in the cases of a last resort and in particular to minimize any negative impact on the emotional, social and educational development of other students (Cooper and Jacobs 2011).

Further to this, participants of the study conducted by Shevlin, Winter and Flynn (2013) questioned whether expecting students with significant social, emotional or behavioural disturbances to adapt to mainstream rules, routines and regulations was in fact acting in the best interests of the students.

Challenges towards the inclusion of students with such needs have also impacted on the enrolment policies and practices which exist, which will be discussed in greater detail subsequently.

Enrolment policies

Research has indicated that exclusionary and discriminatory enrolment practices and policies exist in Ireland which are creating barriers to inclusion (Watson 2009; Rose et al 2015). In particular these barriers appeared to exist for students with more complex needs or challenging behaviours (Rose et al 2015) along with intellectual disabilities and pervasive developmental disabilities (Watson 2009), which is somewhat reflective of the arguments being made in the paragraph above relating to labels and categories of SEN.

Rose et al (2015) found that although schools' SEN and enrolment policies are positive about their role in supporting all learners, many contain clauses that identify reasons why some students may not be accepted, such as for example *“unless that (enrolment) would be inconsistent with the best interests of the pupil concerned and the effective provision of education for other pupils with whom the pupil concerned is to be educated”*. (Rose et al 2015 p 54).

Primary and post primary case study schools in the study by Rose et al (2015) also seemed to have concerns about their legal position should they be unable to cater for the needs of students with SEN and some principals expressed concern that they were obliged to take in students with SEN but nobody was obliged to provide resources to them. Further to this some principals raised concern over the impact on other students of having students with SEN in classes without adequate resources to meet their needs.

Watson (2009) presented parents experiences of the reasons given to them regarding the non-enrolment of their child with SEN into schools. It was stated by these parents that principals declared that their school did not or could not cater for special needs because of lack of experience of the particular disabilities, limited trained personnel or resource teacher allocations to meet the child's needs and an unwillingness or inability to have assistants in the class. Additionally it was stated by some parents that 'Cherry-picking' existed whereby the “easiest child” was chosen for the school over students who may have more complex needs.

Maintenance of stipulated teacher student ratios legitimates capping of numbers in special settings which can lead to only a certain number of students with SEN being allocated places in schools and it was stated by one parent that she was left feeling the need to “sell her (child) to the school” in relation to her being an “easy child” (Watson 2009 p.37).

Principals in the same study (Watson 2009) cited similar concerns to those in the study by Rose et al (2015) in relation to the allocation of resources for SEN having an impact on their ability to allow enrolment of all students with SEN. Further to this it was explained that at times enrollment was denied if the student's needs cannot

be met from 'within current provision', effectively capping enrolment at previously attained support levels (Watson 2009 p37).

Exclusionary enrolment practices as outlined above clearly present a significant barrier to the rights based access to education for all as advocated by European and United Nations policy documents, however it seems the issue of allocation of resources can be held somewhat accountable for much of the shortcomings in enrolment procedures, thereby placing the issue out of the schools hands to some extent.

Limited Resources

Inclusion, as Watson argues, is "resource sensitive" (2009, p. 278). For inclusion to succeed the provision of adequate resources at class and whole school level is essential and such provision is dependent upon government funding (O'Riordan 2015).

Research findings from studies conducted by Watson (2009), Shevlin, Winter and Flynn (2013) and Rose et al (2017) all concur with statements that a greater provision of resources was needed to address the diverse learning needs of all students with SEN. In particular it was indicated that there was a need for greater access to professional support and therapeutic services such as accessible occupational, physical and speech and language therapies and support from the National Educational Psychological Service (Watson 2009; Shevlin, Winter and Flynn 2013). In particular, the issue of assessment of needs appeared to be of concern with reference being made to "lengthy referral waiting lists to child guidance clinics, and poor liaison and communication between the clinics and school special needs teams in terms of diagnosis and intervention" (Shevlin Winter and Flynn 2013, p1128). This issue with establishing effective inter-agency collaboration to improve inclusion practices is one which was also raised by research conducted by Kinsella and Senior (2008).

Improvements in resources are obviously dependent on availability of funding and such funding mechanisms and resource allocation have been described as being relatively ad-hoc (Ferguson 2014). Participants of research by Ferguson indicated that genuine inclusion was often compromised by a lack of funding for what were considered to be vital resources to aid childrens development such as SNA support, furniture and equipment (Ferguson 2014). A concern which was echoed by Varynen in 2000 who stated there were major issues with the funding mechanisms needed to provide resources to allow for the diverse learning needs of all.

Therefore, although the OECD (2003) report warned that the education of students with SEN could not be achieved without additional resources to allow them to access the curriculum on an equal basis with their peers, it would appear that the reality of supports being offered are not adequate for the needs which exist to ensure satisfactory inclusion practices.

Time

Along with limited resources, research indicated that limited time was afforded to teachers and principals to allow them to plan for effective inclusion practices (Shevlin, Winter and Flynn 2013; O’Riordan 2017; Shevlin et al 2009). A number of reasons were identified as needing more time to allow for effective inclusion practices, a summary list of such reasons is presented below:

- lesson planning
- administration
- paperwork
- correcting homework
- developing policy
- staff liaison and collaboration
- screening and identification of pupils with SEN
- liaison with parents and with other professionals
- development individual plans and programmes

- meeting the demands of the revised curriculum at primary level
- responding to demands of teaching subjects at examination level at secondary level

(Shevlin et al., 2013, p. 1128)

Such constraints on time lead to lack of collaboration and lack of ability to differentiate for students with SEN along with limited opportunity to get to know the needs of the students.

Teachers in the O’Riordan (2017) study reiterated this concern stating that they felt that they were “so busy covering the curriculum” that it was difficult to “adapt it for a few when...there’s so much to get done with the rest.” (O’Riordan 2017 p.49.). The lack of designated time for planning inclusive practices can have an effect at a whole school level (Shevlin et al, 2009) because when meetings are not taking place, or are taking place at unsuitable times and places, frustration can grow which can lead to isolated and unconnected planning (O’Riordan 2017; Stevens and O’Moore 2009).

Academic Pursuits

Due in part to the exam driven education system in Ireland, many schools have become worried that their academic performance and reputation might be damaged if they were to become ‘too’ inclusive (Dyson and Millward, 2000). This perception exists in spite of research findings that show only a very small statistically negative relationship between inclusivity and attainment, most of which can be explained by the fact that many of the most inclusive schools are in areas of social and economic disadvantage (Dyson et al., 2004).

Nevertheless this increasing emphasis on academic excellence is only adding to the issues of time constraints, limited resources and restrictive enrollment policies which were discussed above. Furthermore it has been suggested that judging a schools success on the basis of academic results alone may be contradictory to

concepts of inclusion and can dissuade teaching practices which allow for student diversity (Winter and O'Raw 2010; Ainscow et al., 2006).

Winter and O'Raw (2010) recommend that flexibility and variety must be put at the core of an inclusive school and that their goal should be, 'to offer every individual a relevant education and optimal opportunities for development' (UNESCO, 2005, p.16).

Teaching Expertise and Training

The NCSE have stated that "*The class or subject teacher has the primary responsibility for the progress of all students in their class, including those with special educational needs*" (NCSE 2010 p. 71). With the indications above that inadequate resources and time are made available to allow for quality inclusion procedures to be employed; there is undoubtedly increased pressure on the class teacher to provide appropriate inclusion practices for students with SEN while also trying to achieve academic achievement as outlined above.

It is unsurprising then that researchers have documented the role of teachers in establishing inclusive learning environments is critical (Shevlin, Winter and Flynn 2013; Forlin 2010b; Leung and Mak 2010) with the quality of inclusion practices largely relying on teacher expertise, capacity and attitudes (Hornby 2010; Horne and Timmons 2009). Regrettably, findings from the literature on inclusive education in Ireland would suggest that teachers have insufficient knowledge and expertise in the area of SEN (Rose et al 2015), lack adequate levels of training (Shevlin, Winter and Flynn 2013; Ferguson 2014) and lack the capacity to meet the needs of some students with SEN (Watson 2009).

The need for improved undergraduate, postgraduate and professional development training in the area of SEN and inclusion in order to allow teachers to create inclusive learning environments has been well documented both nationally and internationally (Shevlin, Winter and Flynn 2013; Avramidis and Norwich 2002;

Forlin 2010b; Ring and Travers, 2005; Shevlin et al, 2008; O’Riordan 2017).

Furthermore such training and upskilling appears to be of equal importance to both newly qualified teachers (Avramidis, Bayliss, and Burden 2000; Garner 1996) and experienced teachers (Florian and Rouse 2010; Rose 2001). Concern has been expressed therefore that the feasibility of inclusive education models could face growing doubt, along with negative attitudes towards students with SEN increasing, if access to continued professional development remains limited (Shevlin, Winter and Flynn 2013; Avramidis and Norwich 2002; Hollins and Guzman 2005).

It has been declared however, that students with SEN do not require “radically different approaches, but more care and intensive support” (McPhillips and Shevlin, 2009, p. 71). With this in mind it has been suggested that once teachers overcome their initial fears of their abilities, they are quite capable of applying creative strategies to enable children to access the curriculum (O’Riordan 2017; Ring and Travers, 2005; Shevlin, Noonan Walsh, Kenny, McNeela and Molloy, 2003).

Teacher Attitudes

According to O’Brien (2000), the real key resource for successful inclusion lies inside the teacher’s head. In other words the teacher’s attitude towards inclusion is a very important factor to consider when examining inclusion practices. Vayrynen (2000) supports this concept with the statement that attitudes are the greatest barrier, or the greatest asset, to the development of inclusion in education (Vayrynen, 2000, para. 4).

Findings in the literature appear to suggest that some mainstream teachers have significant reservations about the viability of inclusion in reality (Winter and O’Raw 2010). Furthermore, research conducted by Shevlin, Winters and Flynn (2013) maintain that an issue in schools often lies in the teachers “attitudes about autonomy, territory and self-protection” (Shevlin, Winters and Flynn 2013, p1129). Findings in their research suggest that some teachers are opposed to having to differentiate for students with SEN due to a belief that such a role is the job of the

special education teacher and SEN team. This perception of students with SEN being ‘someone else’s problem’ was also apparent in research by Avramidis, Bayliss, and Burden (2000). It was acknowledged in research by Shevlin, Winter and Flynn (2013) that such attitudes were predominantly seen in older, more experienced teachers and one explanation offered for such resistance was that of “fear of the unknown, fear of criticism and ultimately fear of failure (Shevlin, Winters and Flynn 2013, p 1129). Such justifications for attitudes were also reflected in research by Croll and Moses (2000) and Hodgkinson (2005).

Interestingly, much of literature suggests that teachers’ attitudes appeared to be influenced more by the severity and/or type of students disabling condition and less by teacher-related variables (Avramidis and Norwich 2002; Winter and O’Raw 2010). In particular teachers seem to have substantial difficulty in the inclusion of students with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties in the classroom (Cooper and Jacobs 2011), a challenge which was discussed at the beginning of this section in relation to labels and disability types.

2.1.11 Moving Towards an Understanding of Inclusion

Striving for the development of an education system underpinned by tolerance, diversity and equity is an uncontested goal of all education stakeholders. However, the means by which to achieve this is a lot more controversial and despite the development of international policy and legislation around the inclusion agenda, the understanding of what inclusive education means is still the subject of much heated debate (Slee, 2001a; Winter and O’Raw, 2010).

The fact that a single accepted definition for inclusion has yet to gain currency reflects its complex and contested nature (Florian, 1998). What can be agreed upon is that inclusive education focuses on both the rights of students and how education systems can be altered to respond to diverse groups of learners. Opportunities for equal participation for all is at the core of this concept and ensuring the educational needs of all children, regardless of ability, are met in an environment of mutual respect and understanding.

The ideology of inclusion must be understood as not merely an organisational change but also a movement with a clear philosophy which is rooted in the ideology of human rights: 'seeing individual differences not as a problem to be fixed, but as opportunities for enriching learning' (UNESCO, 2005, p. 9).

The four key elements of inclusion presented by UNESCO provide a useful summary of the principles that support inclusive practice. These elements are:

- 1. Inclusion is a process.*
- 2. Inclusion is concerned with the identification and removal of barriers.*
- 3. Inclusion is about the presence, participation and achievement of all students.*
- 6. Inclusion invokes a particular emphasis on those groups of learners who may be at risk of marginalisation, exclusion or underachievement.*

(UNESCO, 2005, p.15).

2.2 Post Primary education and Physical Education in Ireland

2.2.1 Post Primary Education Structure

In Ireland post primary education consists of a three-year Junior Cycle (1st – 3rd year), followed by a two year Senior Cycle (5th and 6th year), with the option to have an extra Transition Year (TY) between the 2 cycles.

Students usually begin the Junior Cycle at age 12. The Junior Certificate examination is taken after three years. The main objective of the Junior Cycle is for students to complete a broad and balanced curriculum, and to develop the knowledge and skills that will enable them to proceed to Senior Cycle education. A new Framework for Junior Cycle was introduced on a phased basis in September 2014, which has made significant changes to its structure. The new Junior Cycle is

stated to offer revised subjects and short courses, a focus on literacy, numeracy and key skills, and new approaches of assessment and reporting (DES, 2015).

According to the Department of Education each schools new Junior cycle Programme:

- will be guided by the twenty-four statements of learning, eight principles and eight key skills that are at the core of the new Junior Cycle
- will encompass learning in subjects or a combination of subjects and short courses
- will include an area of learning entitled Wellbeing
- will provide a range of other learning experiences
- may include priority learning units (PLUs) that will help to provide a junior cycle programme that is appropriate to the needs of particular students with significant SEN.

Schools will have the flexibility and discretion to decide what combination of subjects, short courses or other learning experiences will be provided in their three-year junior cycle programme.

The Senior Cycle caters for students in the 15 to 18 year age group. It includes an optional Transition Year, which follows immediately after the Junior Cycle. TY provides an opportunity for students to experience a wide range of educational inputs, including work experience, over the course of a year that is free from formal examinations.

During the final two years of Senior Cycle students take one of three programmes, each leading to a State Examination: the traditional Leaving Certificate, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) or the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA).

The Leaving Certificate

The traditional Leaving Certificate examination is the terminal examination of post-primary education and is taken when students are typically 17 or 18 years of age. Syllabi are available in more than 30 subjects and students are required to take at least five subjects, one of which must be Irish.

Over the course of this research project the structural changes as outlined above have resulted in some adjustments to the PE curriculum in Junior Cycle, including the introduction of PE as a short-course. There have also been changes to the senior cycle PE curriculum with the introduction of two new curricula for PE including Leaving Certificate Physical Education (LCPE), an optional examinable subject for the Leaving Certificate, and Senior Cycle Physical Education (SCPE), a non-examinable physical education curriculum for delivery at Senior Cycle.

I will present information below on the PE curriculum which was applicable during the timeframe in which this research was conducted, which was 2015, but will also outline the changes which have been implemented in both junior and senior cycle PE.

Alternative post primary education programmes

Research has shown that students with SEN often experience exclusion from full curricular access in post-primary schools (O'Mara et al, 2012). In addition to the Junior and Leaving Certificate programmes, alternative post primary programmes in the past 15 years (Junior Certificate School Programme [JCSP] in junior cycle and the Leaving Certificate Applied [LCA] in senior cycle) aim to make the post-primary curriculum more accessible to students with diverse needs or at risk of early school leaving.

In 1996 the DES introduced the JCSP as an intervention within the Junior Certificate aimed at potential early school leavers. An evaluation of the programme however highlighted that many schools found the programme to be suitable for

students with SEN and a majority of such students began to take this course as opposed to the Junior Certificate.

At senior cycle the majority of students take the Leaving Certificate Established (LCE); however, alternative programmes such as the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) have been targeted at students who struggle with their work at junior cycle, experience behavioural difficulties and/or have special needs or learning difficulties (Banks et al, 2010).

2.2.2 Physical Education Structure in Ireland

Junior cycle

Although the junior cycle was under reform during this research, for the duration of the research the PE Curriculum for junior cycle would have adhered to the curriculum published in 2003 by the NCCA.

The aim of the Junior Certificate PE curriculum is to contribute to the preparation of the student for a life of autonomous wellbeing. This aim will be pursued through the following objectives:

- provide the opportunity for students to develop personally, socially, and physically through participation in physical activities in a safe, challenging and enjoyable environment
- reinforce and further develop the physical education knowledge, understanding, skills, and competencies acquired at primary level
- prepare students for the requirements of further programmes of study, of employment, or of life outside full-time education
- provide an opportunity for students to critically reflect on physical activity through participation in a broad, well-balanced programme

- develop in students an ability to make informed judgements in respect of physical activity
- encourage an appreciation of physical activity and of the benefits of an active lifestyle
- promote positive attitudes towards participation in physical activity and towards co-operation with others in that participation
- enable students to take responsibility for the organisation and development of their learning within the framework provided

(NCCA, 2003)

In attempting to promote a positive and constructive attitude to physical activity, it is critical that the student learns to value physical activity and demonstrate positive attitudes towards participation. Participation in PE should promote recognition of individual capacities, a positive attitude towards participation and an appreciation of the benefits of interaction with others.

The syllabus includes a number of areas of study representative of a range of practical activities, each of which has particular characteristics and contributes to the attainment of the overall aim of PE. These areas of study are: 1. Adventure activities 2. Aquatics 3. Athletics 4. Dance 5. Invasion games 6. Net and fielding games 7. Gymnastics 8. Health-related activity

This syllabus is developed on the basis of a time allocation of two hours per week.

The 'New Framework for Junior Cycle' (Department of Education and Skills 2014), which began its phased introduction in 2014/15 has caused major reform to the junior certificate PE curriculum. Within this new framework a subject titled 'Wellbeing' has been introduced which became compulsory for all students in September 2017. The Wellbeing programme consists of three previously separate subject areas of physical education, social, personal and health education (SPHE) and civic, social and political education (CSPE), along with guidance, to provide

'learning opportunities to enhance the physical, mental, emotional and social wellbeing and resilience of students (Department of Education 2015). This new programme is mandated to get at least 300 hours of timetabled engagement over the three years of the junior cycle with at least 135 hours being dedicated to PE. The consequences of this new Wellbeing programme in relation to PE is that for the first time in Ireland PE will be a compulsory element for all students in the first three years of post-primary education.

In addition to the establishment of the Wellness programme, a 100 hour short course in PE, which can be developed by teachers or other agencies, has also been introduced and can be offered by schools to students in the junior cycle in addition to the timetabled Wellbeing programme.

Senior Cycle

During the course of this research the PE at senior cycle worked from the same syllabus/curriculum as 2003 junior cycle PE curriculum outlined above. The main emphasis in the senior cycle (incorporating all subjects) is the Leaving Certificate exam and gaining entry into further education or training. At the time of this research, PE was not an examinable subject, therefore there has tended to be a lack of priority given to its status with PE often being regarded as a *“peripheral or second class subject...lacking in educational value”* (European Committee for the development of sport (CDDS) 2002, p.6).

For a number of years however there have been proposals to develop a PE curriculum for senior cycle and September 2018 marked the commencement of the phased introduction of two new curricula for physical education at Senior Cycle. These curricula are Leaving Certificate Physical Education (LCPE), an optional examinable subject for the Leaving Certificate, and Senior Cycle Physical Education (SCPE), a non-examinable physical education curriculum for delivery at Senior Cycle. The respective aims of LCPE and SCPE are to *“develop the learner’s capacity to become an informed, skilled, self-directed and reflective performer in physical education and physical activity in senior cycle and in their*

future life” (Department of Education and Skills 2017 p.7) and to ‘*encourage learner’s confident, enjoyable and informed participation in physical activity while in Senior Cycle and in their future lives*’ (NCCA 2017, p.9).

Phase 1 rollout of this new framework for PE in the senior cycle, started in September 2018, with a national rollout intended for September 2020.

Although the establishment of PE as an examinable subject is long-awaited, questions remain over whether schools may offer only LCPE and not SCPE, thereby appealing predominantly to those who excel athletically and not providing for those who are already inactive.

PE Provision and Participation

Whilst this climate in PE is undoubtedly evolving with the introduction of the major modifications to the PE framework at both junior and senior cycle as outlined above, this research was conducted at a period where PE was often seen as a second class subject. As a result of this, research findings would appear to suggest that the quality of provision of PE in schools was very variable and must contend with many challenges. Some of these challenges included lack of facilities, lack of time on the timetable and lack of qualified PE Teachers.

MacPhail (2006) conducted research on the provision of PE in Post Primary Schools and found that inadequate PE facilities and equipment was reported as the largest barrier to quality PE provision for many schools with 10% reporting having no facility at all for PE in their school. Time was also reported to be a big barrier for PE teachers with the majority reporting concern over the low allocation of just 35-45 minutes of PE per week, which they felt was inadequate to offer worthwhile and beneficial PE. Data further indicated a trend of diminishing time allocation for PE within the curriculum from year 1 (76 minutes/week) to year 6 (58 minutes/week). A concerning finding which arose from this research was the use of non-qualified PE teachers delivering the PE classes. While 91% of principals reported that their school insists on a recognised PE qualification when employing

a PE teacher, many believed they were not in a position to make a PE post available in their schools. This resulted in teachers not qualified to teach PE being involved in delivering PE classes.

The children's sport participation and physical activity study (CSSPA, 2010) reported that a worryingly low 10% of post-primary students were timetabled for the Department of Education and Skills recommended minimum minutes of 120 minutes of PE per week. The average number of minutes of PE that post primary school students reported participating in was 77 minutes. The study also reported that girls were likely to receive less physical education time than boys. In 2014, from a sample of 371 6th year students, no participants reported meeting the recommended minimum minutes of 120 minutes of PE per week and the average number of minutes of PE per week was reported as being 60.5 minutes (Duff et al. 2014).

2.2.3 Benefits of PE Participation

According to the National Association for Sport and PE (NASPE, 2013c) and Simms, Bock and Hackett (2013), an active lifestyle has numerous benefits, including increasing blood to the brain, increasing mental alertness and helping to maintain a positive attitude. Furthermore, exercise increases the heart's ability to maintain efficiency and prevent illness, allowing students to attend school more often. Regular exercise also raises students' self-esteem and decreases their chance of developing depression or other mental illnesses (NASPE, 2013c).

PE is potentially the main source of physical activity and the development of physical skills for many children and youth (Bailey 2006; Burgeson 2004) and it has been documented that for an increasing number of children PE may be the only opportunity they have during the week to engage in moderate to vigorous physical activity [Trudeau and Shephard 2005],

It is not surprising therefore that the role of PE in the prevention of chronic illness and promotion of healthy lifestyle behaviours has been well documented in the

literature (Le Masurier and Corbin, 2006; Sallis et al., 2012; Trudeau and Shephard, 2005; Woods et al., 2010). Furthermore, Bailey (2006) and Burgeson (2004) have alluded to the holistic benefits of PE for all students as it supports the development of three critical learning areas: cognitive, psychomotor and affective.

Importantly, PE provides a unique opportunity to practice and reinforce skills likely to play a foundational role in developing pathways for lifelong physical activity participation, fitness and good health (NCCA, 2003; European Commission et al., 2013) which means that PE is not only important for children's current physical activity behaviors but has the potential to lead to healthy activity habits later in life also (Le Masurier and Corbin 2006).

The benefits of PE will be discussed in more detail below under the headings physical benefits (including health benefits and fundamental movement skills), social benefits, cognitive benefits and psychological benefits.

Physical benefits

The importance of physical activity in reducing the risk of chronic illness such as heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure, some cancers and diabetes have been well documented (Department of Health UK 2004). Furthermore there is evidence that regular physical activity can improve immune system functioning, which can relieve symptoms of asthma, fibromyalgia and arthritis (Corbin et al 2006). The onset of chronic conditions such as diabetes and heart disease were typically thought to be illnesses of adulthood, however, worrying research has highlighted that such diseases are becoming more and more prevalent in youths (Le Masurier and Corbin 2006). In particular the onset of type 2 diabetes among youths has seen a 10-fold increase in recent years (Ball and McCargar 2003; Molnar, 2004). With a wealth of evidence showing that inactivity is one of the most significant causes of onset of metabolic illness such as type 2 diabetes and subsequently death, disability, and reduced quality of life (Bailey 2006), it is increasingly important that we ensure children of today engage in sufficient physical activity and develop effective pathways for a physically active life.

Additionally, a combination of economic pressures and parental concerns for safety means that fewer children are able to play games in non-school settings (Bailey 2006) which may be impacting on the amount of daily physical activity participation by children. Therefore PE provides an important opportunity for children to ensure they are meeting their daily recommended physical activity levels in order to gain the physical benefits highlighted above.

Data from the CSSPA (2010) study conducted in Ireland has revealed that one in four children (N = 1215; 13.4 ± 2.1 years) was unfit, overweight or obese and had high blood pressure (Woods, Tannehill, Quinlan, Moyna, & Walsh, 2010). Research has indicated that obesity, physical activity and fundamental motor skill competence and performance have an interlinked relationship (O' Brien, Belton and Issartel, 2016). Furthermore children who have acquired a strong foundation of fundamental movement skills have been shown to be more likely to be active during childhood and later in life (Bailey 2006).

Quality PE provides the chance for children to engage in regular physical activity along with developing, practicing and reinforcing fundamental movement skills (Sallis & McKenzie, 1991; Belton et al., 2014; O' Brien et al., 2013; Robinson & Goodway, 2009). Developing such skills and knowledge has the potential to encourage children to lead physically active lives (Trudeau, Laurencelle, & Shephard, 2004; Trudeau et al., 1998) and consequently to reduce the occurrence of obesity and its related diseases.

Social

Due to both the naturally occurring and contrived social interaction which occur in the PE setting (Bailey 2000) it is said to be a prime time for the development of social skills and positive social behaviours. In addition to this, many studies have illustrated that appropriately structured and presented activities in PE class can

influence the development of prosocial behavior (Bailey 2006) and can even combat antisocial and criminal behaviors in youth (Morris, Sallybanks, Willis, Makkai 2003).

Some of the key social behaviours which have been documented to have the potential to develop during PE include improvements in moral reasoning (Romance ,Weiss and Bockoven 1986), fair play and sportsmanship (Gibbons, Ebbeck , Weiss 1995) and personal responsibility (Hellison 1998). Of course the opportunity to develop such skills will only occur in situations where suitably trained teachers focus on fostering such values through activities, modelling behavior and asking thought provoking questions of students (Ewing et al. 2002).

Cognitive Benefits

The theory that a 'healthy body leads to a healthy mind,' has been verified by many research studies suggesting that physical activity can support intellectual development in children (Bailey 2006).

Research dating from the 1950s up to recent research published in 2003 has illustrated a positive relationship between PE, PA and physical fitness and academic performance (Hervet and Vanves 1952; Shepard 1997; Salis et al. 1999; CDE, 2003). According to such research many children's academic performance is improved when time for PE is increased in their school day (Hervet 1952; Shepard 1997; Salis et al. 1999) and those with higher physical fitness have been shown to have higher academic results (CDE, 2003).

Additional research has further revealed that bouts of exercise from 20 minutes (Sibley, Etnier, Pangrazi, & Le Masurier, in press) to 30 minutes (McNaughten and Gabbard, 1993) can improve cognitive performance and functioning.

Time and resources for PE have frequently been revealed to be effecting the adequate provision of the subject in Ireland (MacPhail 2006). With schools experiencing budget restraints and pressure to achieve academically over the past decade it seems PE is among the first subjects to be cut back due to a belief that

other exam subjects such as Maths, English and Science should take precedence as time spent on them will lead to improved academic achievements for students (Le Masurier and Corbin 2006). However as demonstrated above, time spent engaging in physical activity during PE is just as valuable to academic achievements as time spent in the classroom. Therefore taking time from PE does not result in more learning in other areas, but it does detract from achieving important PE benefits including those outlined in this review.

Psychological

There is now fairly consistent evidence that regular activity can have a positive effect on our psychological well-being (Bailey 2006), with evidence being especially clear in relation to children's self-esteem (Fox 1998; 2000) and self-confidence (Talbot 2005) but also with links to improving stress, anxiety, and depression (Hassmen, Koivula, Uutela 2000).

It is estimated that more than 20% of individuals meet the criteria for an anxiety disorder by the age of 26 and that receiving a diagnosis of any anxiety disorder during childhood or adolescence predicts impairments in physical, financial, and interpersonal functioning in young adulthood [Copeland 2009]. Regular physical activity, which has been proven to reduce stress and anxiety in children, therefore is paramount to children's mental health and wellbeing. Therefore participation in well planned and implemented PE for children should be viewed as paramount to ensure that the psychological benefits are maximized.

2.2.4 Physical Education Teacher Training

Teacher quality is an essential component of an effective education system both internationally (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005) and in Ireland (Coolahan, 2007a).

In Ireland, the Teacher Education Section (TES) of the Department of Education and Skills is responsible for approving undergraduate and higher diploma courses for teachers in PE. The Teaching Council of Ireland (2013) specifies the

qualification requirements needed to register as a qualified PE Teacher for Post Primary Education:

An applicant must meet all of the following criteria:

1. (a) Applicants must hold a degree-level qualification, with PE studied up to and including third-year level or higher (or modular equivalent).

(b) The qualifying degree must be equivalent to at least Level 8 on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) and with a minimum pass1 result in all examinations pertinent to the subject of PE.

(c) The qualifying degree must carry at least 180 ECTS (European Credit Transfer System) credits (or equivalent) with the specific study of PE comprising at least 90 ECTS credits (or equivalent) and with not less than 10 ECTS credits (or equivalent) studied at third-year level or higher (or modular equivalent).

2. The study of PE during the degree must show that the holder has acquired sufficient knowledge, skills and understanding to teach the PE syllabus to the highest level in post-primary education

(a) To meet this requirement the degree must include the study of all of the following to a minimum of 60 ECTS credits (or equivalent): i. Adventure Activities ii. Aquatics iii. Athletics iv. Dance v. Games vi. Gymnastics vii. Health-Related Activity.

(b) The degree course must also include the study of all of the following to a minimum of 30 ECTS credits (or equivalent): i. Anatomical, Physiological and Biomechanical aspects of Movement ii. Factors which inhibit and promote (Personal, Biological, Psychological, Sociological, Environmental) participation in Physical Activity and Sport iii. Disability and Movement iv. Historical, Sociological and Philosophical aspects of PE v. Growth, Motor Skill Learning and Development of the Child and Adolescent vi. Physical

Activity/Sport Promotion and Health across the Lifespan vii. Artistic and Creative Studies.

3. Applicants must also have completed a programme of post-primary initial teacher education (age range 12-18 years) in which the theory, methodology and practice of teaching PE forms the central aspect. This course must be equivalent to a minimum of 120 ECTS credits (or equivalent).

(The Teaching Council 2013)

At present, there are three third-level institutions providing PE Teacher Education to degree level and adhering to the Teacher Education Section Syllabus to allow for qualification as a PE Teacher for Post Primary Schools. Traditionally in the Irish context, PE graduates work within the post primary school sector. These third level institutions included; University College Cork, Dublin City University and University of Limerick (Crawford, 2012).

Special Education Needs Training in Physical Education

According to Smith and Green (2004) and Smith (2004), any move towards a more progressive PE inclusion agenda must first focus upon the teacher training curriculum as the key agent for change. Multiple researchers and academics have suggested that initial teacher training in special education has a large impact on the outcomes and quality of education received by students with SEN in PE (e.g., Kozub, 1999; Folsom et al. 1999; Smith, 2004; Morley et al., 2005; Meegan and MacPhail, 2006a).

Despite this, research has suggested that teachers receive inadequate amounts of training for teaching students with SEN with most having opportunity only to attend ad hoc training sessions and CPD (Morley et al 2005; Smith and Green 2006). This lack of training was perceived to be one of the most constraining influences on

teachers inclusive practices (Smith and Green 2006). In addition to this it was unearthed that student teachers also received limited amounts of training on SEN in ITT (Vickerman 2007). According to Morley et al (2005 p100) this dearth of training has “serious repercussions for the quality of support experienced by children with SEN”.

Within the Irish context, Crawford (2012) carried out research on Initial Teacher Training Physical Education Provision (ITTPE), in relation to accommodating children with SEN. In this study all PETE providers offered core modules in APA in their PE degrees. Across the four institutions, opportunities for undergraduates to gain hands on experience with students with SEN varied, although all programmes provided both theoretical and practical content. Theoretical content was similar across the four providers with practical experience varying from stand-alone modules to SEN related study being accommodated through the degree from second year. From this examination of programme content and delivery, great variation exists across the four institutes especially in relation to the amount and manner of time allocated to APA related topics and the practical experience gained at undergraduate levels. The amount of time allocated to APA related study and practice ranged from 29 hours to 96 hours, throughout the degree programmes.

The Teaching Council has the responsibility to mandate for what is taught on initial teacher training programmes, and in 2014 they made SEN modules compulsory on all teacher training programmes. Despite this, overall, PE teachers have indicated that the PE undergraduate training is inadequate, with regard to preparing PE teachers working with children with SEN (Crawford, 2011, Department of Education and Science, 1999; House of the Oireachtas, 2005; Meegan and MacPhail, 2006b).

It has been emphasized that teacher training providers are a crucial link between legislation and policies of inclusive education, and the process of providing teachers with adequate knowledge and skills to ensure that students with SEN actually receive the stated levels of inclusion (DePauw and Doll-Tepper 2000; Morley et al. 2005). Therefore according to Smith and Green (2004) focus must be

placed on the teacher training curriculum as the main mediator for change towards a more progressive PE inclusion agenda.

2.3. Inclusion in Physical Education

2.3.1 Importance of Physical Education for students with SEN

Whilst physical activity and PE in general has been established as providing significant benefits for all children (Bailey 2006; Le Masurier and Corbin 2006; Sallis & McKenzie, 1991; Trudeau, Laurencelle, & Shephard, 2004), it has been stated in the literature that these benefits are particularly important for individuals with various physical, mental and developmental disabilities (Cooper and Quatrano, 1999). There are numerous reasons for such statements, such as functional movement increases, social gains and improvements in self-confidence (Shifflett et al, 1994). In addition to this lies the fact that people with disabilities have generally been attributed to having low physical fitness levels, which can be attributed to many factors, one of which being a lack of organized opportunity to engage in physical activity (Cluphf et al, 2001). In Ireland, data analyzed from the national SLÁN survey (NDA 2006) indicated that levels of physical inactivity were higher among people with disabilities, with 35% reporting no physical activity of at least moderate intensity, compared to 10% of the respondents with no disability.

It is for such reasons that PE in a school setting is such an important platform for students with SEN to receive adequate levels of physical activity (Kodish et al, 2006). Moreover, from an inclusion perspective, PE has frequently been cited as a social arena (Sherrill, 2004) and a setting whereby the ability to express oneself and “play games together” can, in the correct context, allow for feelings of being included (Balfe and Travers, 2011). Conversely however, PE has also been found to be an arena whereby students with SEN may feel exposed and where their limitations can become visible and obvious to others (Duesund 1993) which is why a special focus needs to be made to ensure such students have all the support and facilitation possible for their PE class.

According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), people with disabilities have an increased chance of health difficulties. Obesity rates for children with disabilities are 38% higher than for their peers without disabilities; furthermore, adults with disabilities have a 58% higher chance of being obese than adults without disabilities (CDC 2010). Of course this finding must be interpreted with caution, as rates will undoubtedly vary between individuals and also within groups of different types of disabilities (National Disability Authority 2005). Several factors can contribute to the higher obesity rates of students with disabilities. In particular, students with disabilities may have limited access to healthy food, have difficulty chewing or swallowing food, take medications with side-effects such as weight gain or changes in appetite, possess physical limitations or experience pain with movement, or inaccessible environments (CDC 2014). Although a high percentage of students with SEN spend more time in school than their peers without SEN (i.e., special education services support students ages 3 through 21), it has been suggested that they are spending less time in PE and more time working vigorously to keep up with the curriculum (Burgeson 2004).

2.3.2 Barriers to Inclusion for students with SEN in PE

The education of all students within a PE environment presents the teacher with a range of issues beyond the context of a classroom setting, including the physical nature of the activities, the use of specialist areas and equipment, and the dynamics involved in grouping and organizing students within physical activities and the mixed physical and cognitive abilities of the students. It has been suggested that such issues are exacerbated by the presence of a range of students with SEN in the PE class (Bailey and Robertson, 2000; Vickerman, 2002).

Among the most commonly expressed in the literature relating to the barriers to including students with SEN in PE include; teachers training and expertise (Morley et al. 2005; Smith and Green, 2004; Vickerman, 2002, 2007), teachers perceptions and attitudes (Block & Obrusnikova, 2007; Lytle & Collier, 2002; Combs, Elliott, &

Whipple, 2010), types of activities being performed (Maher (2010b Fitzgerald, 2005; Smith, 2004) and the types of SEN of students (Hodge et al. 2004; Clough and Lindsay, 1991; Walker and Bullis, 1991; Yell, 1995; Rizzo and Vispoel, 1991). These barriers will all be discussed in greater detail in this section.

Teacher Expertise

The inadequacies of teacher training programs to prepare PE teachers to successfully include students with SEN in PE have been well documented (Maher 2010). Research in the UK on the perceptions of PE teachers and academics towards inclusive PE for example, has highlighted a perceived failure of the British Government to equip PE teachers with the knowledge, skill, experience and confidence to fully include students with SEN in their lessons (Morley et al., 2005; Smith and Green, 2004; Vickerman, 2002, 2007).

Research undertaken by Vickerman (2007) in the UK highlighted that just 37.5 % of trainee teachers were given the opportunity to teach students with SEN during their ITT and that few students were actually assessed on the practices of inclusion of students with SEN, with preference being given to examination of the academic principals of inclusion instead. Furthermore it was noted that 37.5% of the ITT providers surveyed suggested that their staff did not actually have direct SEN experience or qualifications. These findings strongly emphasizes the shortcomings in ITT provision with regard to the inclusion of students with SEN in PE.

In addition to this Morley et al (2005) and Smith and Green (2006) suggested that practicing teachers also had infrequent opportunities to upskill on training for teaching students with SEN, with most only attending ad hoc training sessions and CPD.

It is unsurprising then that without the adequate levels of training and preparation for PE teachers, that research has identified PE teachers as believing they are inadequately prepared to effectively teach students with SEN. As such, a breadth of literature has reported that teachers feel a lack of perceived readiness and

support to include students with SEN satisfactorily in PE (Depauw and Gockarp, 1994, LaMaster et al., 1998, Lienert et al, 2001, Hodge et al, 2004, Morley et al., 2005; Smith and Green, 2006; Klavina et al., 2007, Vickerman & Coates, 2009). Furthermore, findings from Morley et al. (2005) and Smith and Green (2004) suggested that some PE teachers felt they were simply unable to include students with SEN in PE lessons, particularly if it was a team game based lesson. Morley et al (2005) reported teachers having feelings of “not knowing” (p.91) how to provide the best support for students with SEN despite wanting to be able to include them. In this study teachers considered their ability to help the students to be based on the students ability to participate and integrate into the lesson (Morley et al 2005).

Conversely however, findings by Coates (2012) indicated that 75% of students surveyed agreed or strongly agreed that they would be able to differentiate their PE lessons to meet individual student’s needs and 67% also agreed or strongly agreed that they felt confident in teaching children with SEN in their lessons. Interestingly within this research study the participants alluded to the fact that it was not their ITT which had enabled them to feel this level of confidence or preparation, but factors which contributed were not explored.

Teacher Attitudes and Perceptions

PE teachers’ positive attitudes, perceptions and interactions are important factors in guaranteeing meaningful learning experiences of students with SEN who are included in general PE (Block & Obrusnikova, 2007). As such, the attitudes of PE teachers towards teaching students with SEN have been thoroughly explored by academics in the field (e.g., Combs, Elliott, and Whipple 2010; Hodge et al 2004; Qi & Ha, 2012)

Research indicates that while student teachers support the inclusion philosophy, there is a general feeling that achieving full inclusion in schools is an unrealistic aim (Smith and Thomas, 2006). Smith and Green (2004) and Smith (2004) noted that the PE teachers expressed concern over the extent to which students with SEN can and are being fully included in the PE curriculum as it currently exists. In

this regard, Smith and Thomas (2006) and Coates (2012) concluded that if teachers are unwilling to accept and adopt inclusion ideologies positively in their practice, there is a concern that it will not be possible to achieve inclusion in PE at all.

In summary, although teachers seem to reveal both positive and negative attitudes toward teaching students with SEN in their PE classes (Combs et al., 2010), it is obvious that more support and training is needed for teachers to effectively instruct students of all abilities (Hodge et al., 2004; Morley et al 2005).

Research exploring the teacher-related variables which are associated with attitudes towards inclusion revealed that favourable attitudes were seen with female teachers (Conatser et al., 2000; Meegan & MacPhail, 2006b), those who had more experience with students with disabilities (Block & Rizzo, 1995 ; Rizzo & Vispoel, 1991 Tripp & Rizzo, 2006), those who had more academic preparation (Block & Rizzo, 1995 ; Klavina, 2008; Tripp & Rizzo, 2006) and those with higher perceived competence (Block & Rizzo, 1995; ; Conatser et al., 2002 ; Obrusnikova, 2008 ; Rizzo & Vispoel, 1991 ; Tripp & Rizzo, 2006).

Perceptions in relation to the ideology of inclusion have also been explored with Smith and Green (2004) revealing that PE teachers did not believe students with SEN would be able to achieve the targets of the curriculum in PE, indicating that while teachers support the inclusion philosophy in general there is scepticism over whether achieving it is realistic (Smith and Thomas 2006).Coates (2012) goes on to state that if teachers are reluctant to accept and adopt inclusion ideologies positively in their practice, it will not be viable to achieve inclusion, a rhetoric that was echoed by Smith and Thomas (2006) and Vickerman and Coates (2008). It has been suggested that one way to combat this would be through the provision of suitable and effective training in both ITT and continued professional development (CPD) (Avramidis et al. 2000; Coates 2012).

Type of Activity being performed

Maher (2010b) explored the views of PE teachers in relation to the impact that the type of activities performed in PE had on inclusion. PE teachers in his research indicated that they felt more confident in their ability to include students with SEN in activities which focused on individual skill development in PE rather than team based activities because they could plan for individual needs and did not need to worry about negatively affecting the achievements of the rest of the group.

Additional researchers have made claims which support this finding, with the suggestion that team games are more difficult to plan and teach inclusively due to the need for group interaction, degrees of bodily contact and the restrictions on being able to apply modifications to suit individual needs (Penney 2002; Fitzgerald, 2005; Smith, 2004; Morley et al., 2005).

Interestingly however, Coates (2012) documented opposing views of student teachers with the majority of the participants indicating that they preferred to teach team games and that they felt more prepared to teach students with SEN in this activity area. Coates makes the argument that the justification for such a perception may stem from the sporting tradition followed by the PE teachers in the study along with their age and ethnic background, given that they were in the age range of 20-30 and of white British decent. Therefore perhaps the preference of such activities was more based on their own experiences of PE as opposed to their experiences teaching PE to students with varied abilities.

SEN Types

It has been suggested that the perceptions of PE teachers ability to be inclusive in PE can be influenced by the type of SEN of students in the PE class (Hodge et al. 2004; Smith 2004; Morley et al. 2005; Conatser, Block, & Gansneder 2002; Obrusnikova 2008; Rizzo & Vispoel 1991).

For instance, various studies found that PE teachers in general had more negative attitudes towards teaching students with severe disabilities in contrast to those with

mild disabilities (Block & Rizzo, 1995; Conatser, Block, & Gansneder, 2002; Conatser, Block and Lepore 2000; Duchane & French, 1998; Rizzo & Vispoel, 1991). Conatser, Block, & Gansneder (2002) for example reported that aquatic instructors' perceived behavioral control toward teaching inclusive swim classes was significantly more favorable for students with mild disabilities compared to students with severe disabilities. It was found that this was due to the perception that they had little control over teaching students with severe disabilities, and lacked the adequate resources to confidently teach such students. The researchers suggested that it would seem that obtaining adequate resources would significantly increase instructors' control beliefs toward inclusive behavior a findings which was consistent with those of Ajzen and Madden (1986), Ajzen and Driver (1991,1992), and Theodorakis et al. (1995).

Moreover, research has suggested that the specific type of disability can influence the attitudes of PE teachers. Research has found for example that teachers believe students with emotional and behavioural disorders (EBD) to be the most difficult to include in PE (Morley et al 2005), a finding which has been reflected by other researchers also such as Obrusnikova, (2008) and Rizzo & Vispoel (1991) who indicated that teachers held more favourable attitudes toward teaching students with learning disabilities than teaching those with EBD. This perception has been exhibited across a range of subject areas (Clough and Lindsay, 1991; Walker and Bullis, 1991; Yell, 1995) and additionally concerns have been expressed by teachers regarding the potentially detrimental effect of including students with EBD on the educational attainment of other students in the class (Diamond, 1994: Heflin and Bullock, 1999).

Further research by Hersman and Hodge (2010) has stated that PE teachers were more accepting of teaching students who were hard of hearing or had visual impairments, learning disabilities, and physical disabilities in comparison to those who had severe disabilities and in particular students with attention deficit disorders, attention deficit hyperactivity disorders, learning disabilities, and various

severe disabilities, including severe emotional-behavioral disorders. The consensus from their research was that PE teachers had a lower perceived self-efficacy towards teaching students with the above mentioned SEN types (severe disabilities, learning disabilities and EBD) and thus felt they needed more professional training, knowledge, exposure, and assistance from others to be able to include them effectively in PE. A quote from one PE teacher in their research summarizes such concerns: *“Severe? Uh, that one I probably would not be very confident if they were that severe. I wouldn’t want to teach them without being confident, because that will show. Wouldn’t be good for them, wouldn’t be good for me.”* (Hersman and Hodge 2010, p744).

It would appear evident then that the type of SEN of students has the potential to have a great impact on their inclusion in PE and consequently perhaps on the role of the SNA in PE in order to assist in their inclusion.

2.3.3 Policy and Plans for Inclusion in PE

Curriculum Guidelines for Inclusion

The NCCA clearly states in its curriculum document in 2003 that the PE syllabus underlines the principle of inclusion and subscribes to the basic goal of meeting the needs of all students, regardless of ability or level of development. Furthermore it is stated by the NCCA (2003 p2) that:

“Participation for students is an essential prerequisite to learning in physical education. Schools should facilitate, as far as possible, the inclusion of students with disabilities in all physical education activities. While participation should be inclusive of all students, it is essential to present each student with activities not only for participation but also for progression.”

The new senior cycle PE curriculum also specifies the importance of inclusion in PE and outlines that:

“Senior cycle PE is designed to encourage learners’ active participation in physical education irrespective of their level of ability and/or commitment to physical activity. The flexible nature of the framework facilitates learners in achieving goals that are meaningful and relevant to them.”

(NCCA 2018 p 10)

The document goes on to state that specific physical activities are not the focus of the curriculum and that teachers should negotiate which activities are included to ensure they are meaningful and of interest to all students. It also makes reference to the importance of using different learning approaches and modifications to equipment including the use of adapted or assistive equipment.

2.3.4 Additional Support Staff for teachers for inclusion in PE

The NCSE have stated that *“The class or subject teacher has the primary responsibility for the progress of all students in their class, including those with special educational needs”* (NCSE 2010 p. 71). Despite this, research has shown that PE teachers in particular have difficulties in relation to facilitating the inclusion of students with SEN (Sweeney and Coulter 2008; Block 2003; La Master, Gall, Kinchin and Siedentop 1998; Chandler and Green 1995). Therefore, it is obvious that some assistance is needed to allow the opportunity for increased inclusion in PE. In line with this it has been suggested that *“schools should create a collaborative environment within the school so that teachers can draw from the experiences of others and get the support they need to differentiate effectively and accommodate learners successfully”* (NCSE 2010 p.71). This has been further acknowledged by academics stating that *“No longer can a teacher in a classroom*

with diverse learners meet all the educational, social, and emotional needs of his or her students. It takes collaboration among all professionals in a school system to educate all students" (Duchardt et al., 2011 p.189). Thus, the special education team should facilitate collaboration among team members, including the physical educator to enhance the quality of their students PE (Kowalski et al., 2006)

One important area for collaboration is safety of students with disabilities during physical activities. Establishing rules and following safe routines is critical to ensuring students' safety, regardless of whether they participate in PE class independently or with the support of an adapted PE teacher, a special education teacher, or a paraprofessional (Lieberman, James, and Ludowa, 2004). Clear and constant communication between special and physical educators is a great way to ensure students' safety in PE classes. When physical educators are informed about medical challenges students experience, they can better prepare the PE environment and curriculum (Block et al., 2011; Lytle, Lavay, and Rizzo, 2010).

In spite of this obvious need for support, one study reported that one of the main identified differences between PE and other subject areas was the level of support received from Learning Support Assistants (LSAs) (Morley 2005). LSAs are para educators in England with additional responsibilities to that of the SNA in Ireland. Morley (2005) research noted that the majority of teachers commenting on the lack of support from LSAs: 'Assistants, we don't really see that much of in PE which if anything we probably need more so than other subjects' (P28). Maher (2017) also explored the role of the LSA in PE and found that due to undefined roles, they frequently were not involved in this subject. A distinct lack of research has been conducted on SNAs in PE in Ireland but from comparisons of international research on those with similar roles such as LSAs above, one would denote that the results would be comparable.

The role of the paraeducator in PE in the US has been relatively well researched by comparison. For example, research has shown that the roles of the

paraeducator have not always transferred to the PE environment with paraeducators often seeing PE as a time for a break or a planning period (Block, 2000). This has been due to a lack of expectation to assist in general physical education and undefined roles when positions of employment were accepted (Silliman-French and Fullerton, 1998). Lieberman (2007) published guidelines for the roles and responsibilities which paraeducators can fulfill in general PE, which were developed from research in special education. Other research has identified some of the roles played by the para educator as “keeping students safe and dealing with behavior issues” (Bryan, 2013).

2.4 Special Needs Assistants

2.4.1 Definition

Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) are employed to assist with the care needs of students with SEN in an educational context. SNAs can work in a special school or a mainstream school to assist in the care needs and provision for students with SEN. The allocation of SNA's support may be made on a full or part-time basis and may be shared between students for whom such support has been allocated (DES, 2014).

2.4.2 History of the SNA in Education

The SNA scheme has its origins in a scheme which was referred to as the The Child Care Assistant Scheme which commenced in 1979/1980. The scheme was designed to provide non-teaching assistance for class teachers in special schools. On 16th October 1979, the Department of Finance authorized the creation of seventy-eight such posts and also approved the allocation of a child-care assistant post to all newly established special schools. During the 1980s, restrictions were placed on the recruitment of child-care assistants as part of a public service embargo on recruitment.

From the 1990s, the move away from segregated provision internationally for students with SEN towards inclusion impacted on the need for additional staff to

support students with SEN in mainstream schools. Previously, these students would have attended special schools or may not have accessed education at all in the case of students with severe to profound general learning disabilities.

The Special Education Review Committee (SERC) was established by the Minister for Education in 1991 to report and make recommendations on educational provision for students with SEN (Ireland, 1993). The need for additional SNA posts was expressed by this committee for both mainstream and special schools and recommended that SNAs should not be subject to the embargo on public services due to them being key personal in educational settings.

On 5th November 1998, the Minister for Education and Science announced a major initiative in special education, which offered the first ever guaranteed supports for 23 students with SEN regardless of educational placement (DES, 1998). This initiative together with the move towards inclusive education impacted significantly on the increase in the number of SNA posts, which has since continued to grow (DES, 2011).

The scheme, as currently delivered, is provided specifically to cater for the care needs of students with disabilities in an educational context, where the nature of these care needs have been outlined in professional reports as being so significant that a student will require adult assistance in order to be able to attend school and to participate in education. The SNA scheme is one of the programmes provided by the DES to achieve the goal of supporting inclusion and diversity as outlined in the DES Statement of Strategy 2015-2017. SNAs are allocated to schools, both mainstream and special, in accordance with the DES Circular 0030/2014. Schools make an application to the SENO in order to provide support for students with identified care needs. Special classes in mainstream schools and special schools are generally entitled to a standard allocation of SNA in accordance with ratios defined in the DES Circular 0038/2012 . For example, a special class for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is entitled to an allocation of two SNAs for six students, whereas special classes for students with Emotional Behavioural Disorder (EBD) are entitled to an SNA for every four students? (DES, 2016).

Between 2001 and 2009, the number of SNAs in the system increased from 5, 869 to 10,342 (DES 2011). This further increased to 11,924 SNAs being employed in 2015., See table 2.3 below for outline of increases throughout the years.

Table 2.3 Number of SNAs employed from 1998-2015

Year	Number of Special Needs Assistants	Annual percentage growth
1998	283	
1999	558	90%
2000	1495	168%
2001	2988	100%
2002	4979	67%
2003	5367	8%
2004	5869	9%
2005	7294	24%
2006	8390	15%
2007	9824	17%
2008	10442	6%
2009	10342	-1%
2010	10543	2%
2011	10320	-2%
2012	10503	2%

2013	10669	2%
2014	11175	5%
2015	11924	7%

(DES 2016)

It is a matter for each school to manage the deployment of the SNAs so that students are effectively supported. SNA allocations to schools are reviewed at least once a year by the NCSE.

The number of students accessing SNA support has increased by 34% from 22,284 to 29,953 between 2011/2012 and 2015/2016. The largest proportionate increase within each of the cohorts was in special classes where the number of students increased by 67% from 3,286 to 5,472. The number of students in mainstream schools increased from 12,150 to 16,874 a 39% increase and the number of students in special schools increased by 11% from 6,848 to 7,607.

The number of SNAs allocated to mainstream post-primary schools increased by 4% from 1,842 in 2011/2012 to 1,921 in 2015/2016. From 2011/2012 to 2013/2014 the numbers of SNAs were relatively static between 1,842 and 1,838 although from 2013/2014 the numbers of SNAs have increased by 4.5% from 1,838 to 1,921.

The continuing rise in the number of SNAs, associated costs, and projected increases in the number of students identified as requiring SNA support, together with the need to restate the role, led to a government decision to cap the number of full-time equivalent SNA posts at 10,575, in December 2010 (DES, 2011). Despite this, the number of full time SNAs had further increased by 2017 to 13,969 (NCSE 2018).

Following the numerous publications documenting the changing role of the SNA and the inadequate circular to describe the roles SNAs fulfill in schools, in 2016 the Minister for Education and Skills called for a comprehensive review of the SNA

scheme. The 18 month comprehensive review of the SNA scheme was published in May 2018 by the NCSE along with the identification of an improved model of support to provide better outcomes for students with disability and care needs (NCSE 2018).

The review found that the SNA scheme has played a very important part in assisting students with additional care needs to attend schools, both mainstream and special, and works well particularly in meeting the needs of younger students and those with more “traditional” types of care needs such as toileting, mobility and feeding. The scheme is greatly valued by parents, students and schools and there is evidence of an enduring loyalty and a strong attachment between many schools, students, parents and ‘their SNAs’ (NCSE 2018).

Data reviewed from 291 students who had received SNA support over the past year showed that:

- 11% no longer required SNA support after the year;
- 39% required a reduced level of support for the year ahead;
- 10% needed an increased level of support for the year ahead;
- 40% required the same level of support for the year ahead.

(NCSE 2018)

However frustrations were reported among stakeholders regarding the scheme’s narrow focus which they suggest should be expanded, for example, to enable SNAs to meet student learning, emotional and social needs; and/or to include students without a diagnosis of disability but who have additional needs; and to deliver speech and language and/or occupational and/or physiotherapy programmes (NCSE 2018).

Furthermore some groups considered that teaching assistants should be introduced to assist in meeting some of these wider learning-related needs but from the data collected and reviewed, the NCSE concluded that there was insufficient evidence at this point in time to recommend the introduction of teaching assistants to support students with SEN (NCSE 2018).

Some SNAs have a teaching remit within schools despite this being clearly beyond their remit and/or qualifications and SNAs are also found to be undertaking medically complex and invasive procedures and supporting students with extremely challenging behaviours without adequate training and supervision being provided (NCSE 2018).

Overall the review concluded that a better model of support was required and that SNAs are seen as the answer to everything and work within a scheme that is 'a blunt instrument' to address a wide range and variety of needs. The working group formed in 2017 concluded that students with additional care needs required the right support at the right time and that a range of personnel with relevant qualifications and skillsets was required to provide this support.

It was recommended that SNAs be renamed as inclusion support assistants. The NCSE found that to get better outcomes, some students need different types of intervention such as therapies which may not be readily available. The new model for support which is being advocated for comprises of 13 recommendations, including the provision of a continuum of support, a frontloaded allocation of SNAs to schools and the provision of a national training programme (NCSE 2018).

2.4.3 Role of SNA

At the time of writing this thesis, the SNA scheme was undergoing a review by the NCSE around the roles of the SNA in special and mainstream schools. During the data collection and analysis this review had not been completed or published therefore the role of the SNA will be discussed in relation to the most recent circular at the time of this research, which is Circular 0030/2014.

Prescribed Circular Role

The Special Needs Assistant (SNA) scheme is intended to offer schools additional adult support staff that can assist students with SEN, who also have additional and significant care needs. Such support is offered in order to enable the attendance of those students to school and also to minimise disruption to class or teaching time for the students concerned, or for their peers. Additionally it is hoped that the assistance will develop students independent living skills. The Special Needs Assistant scheme has been a key factor in ensuring the successful inclusion of children with SEN into mainstream education, and also with providing care support to students who are enrolled in special schools and special classes (DES, 2014).

DES Circular 0030/2014 states, 'SNAs should be deployed by schools in a manner which best meets the care support requirements of the children enrolled in the school or whom SNA support has been allocated.' (DES 2014, p. 15).

It is important to note that while Learning support assistants (LSAs) and paraprofessionals in the United Kingdom and the United States have a role in relation to supporting students' learning, this is not the case with the role of the SNA in Ireland. In Ireland the SNA role has a specific focus on the care needs of students with SEN and in theory it should not include any curriculum intervention or support for teaching (Carrig 2004; Logan 2006).

In 2014 circular 0030/2014 entitled, The Special Needs Assistant Scheme to Support Teachers in Meeting the Care Needs of Some Children with Special Educational Needs, Arising from a Disability (DES, 2014), was issued to all

schools. The aim was to provide restatement and clarification of the role of SNA and to reinstate that roles of a teaching nature were not to be fulfilled by SNAs.

This circular emphasizes the role of the SNA in assisting with ‘significant additional care needs’ (p. 5) of students with disabilities. It provides an outline of what is meant by significant additional care needs, with examples of primary and secondary care associated tasks given for further clarification. While there is a distinction made between primary and secondary care associated tasks which may be performed by SNAs, it is clarified that SNA allocation will depend on the presence of significant primary care needs.

The DES (2014) circular 0030/2014 recognizes that all students need care and attention and states that while it is the responsibility of schools to provide for the care and wellbeing of all students, including those with SEN, it should not be assumed that all children who have SEN require access to SNA support. It is stated that:

“For a child to require or qualify for access to SNA support, a child must have an assessed disability. The care needs outlined must be of such significance that they are beyond that which would normally be expected to be provided to a child by the child’s class teacher, support teacher, or other school teachers, or beyond the level of assistance which could be offered to the student by his/ or her fellow pupils in school. The care needs must also be those beyond which could normally be provided for by alternative supportive approaches or modifications of the classroom environment, teaching approaches and/or assistive technology or specialist equipment.”

(DES 2014, p. 5)

Examples of the primary care needs which would be considered significant – and which might require SNA support, listed in the circular include assistance with feeding, toileting, general hygiene, non-nursing medical needs and mobility and

orientation of students, along with providing assistance to teachers in supervision of students (DES 2014, p. 5-6).

SNAs are allocated on the basis of a need to perform the tasks outlined above to meet the primary care needs of students with SEN, however they may also be required to complete secondary care associated tasks, such as for example assisting student with preparation for classes, helping with planning activities and classes and assistance with accessing additional therapies and support services.

It is specifically stated in the circular that SNAs are recruited to assist in the care needs of students with SEN and that they do not have a teaching/pedagogical role. Additionally it is advised that it would not be appropriate for the SNA to take on tasks of a pedagogical nature and that the teacher must have the primary responsibility for teaching and learning and for the social and emotional development and progress of the student. It is suggested therefore that the SNA can assist to ensure the delivery of both class teaching and additional teaching, from learning support teachers for example; but they are not the person who should be delivering this teaching or instruction (DES, 2014). Essentially, the SNA is not an educator, rather they enable education.

In relation to students with emotional and behavioral disturbances (EBD), circular 0030/2014 insists that SNA support should only be provided where it is clear that behavioural management strategies have not been successful. Situations under which an SNA will be allocated to students with EBD are as outlined as being in cases where:

- it is clear that school based interventions have been attempted and have not worked to date
- there is a clear and documented history of violent behaviour, assault, or self harm, or other safety issues including leaving the school premises.
- it has been clearly demonstrated that the behaviour of the child is such that it is impossible to teach him/her in a classroom situation without additional adult assistant support on a temporary basis.

- the school sets out clearly how access to SNA support will support educational and behavioural planning.

(DES 2014, p.11)

Changing Role

It is clear that the role of the Special Needs Assistant has grown to varying degrees from what is outlined in DES Circular 0030/2014, in particular in relation to the meaning of the term 'care needs' which as stated by the DES (2011):

'has been stretched beyond what was intended by the Scheme and this has meant that both parents and schools now expect that the role of the SNA is to carry out a much broader range of duties than originally envisaged.'

(DES 2011, p.9)

The role of SNAs has been a source of ongoing debate, with researchers unanimously reporting that a discrepancy exists between the officially prescribed role of the SNA and the actual practice in schools (Lawlor, 2002; Lawlor and Cregan, 2003; Carrig, 2004; Logan 2006; O'Neill and Rose, 2008).

The Joint Committee on Education and Social Protection (2016) published a report on the role of the SNA. The report was based on a survey of 2,510 SNAs working in mainstream and post primary schools. SNAs in the survey described fulfilling a variety of roles including administrative duties, such as assisting with newsletters, book rental schemes, cleaning, gardening, banking and office work amongst others. Other SNAs reported they are responsible for teaching students in small groups, working with children on a one-to-one basis outside of the classroom, reading, being in charge of the classroom when the teacher is out and working with students who have behavioural, mental health and social issues.

Additional researchers considering the role of the SNA have similarly been met with inconsistencies which imply that policy is at odds with school practice. There is a particular suggestion within the research that SNAs are involved in pedagogical

tasks under the direction of the classroom teacher (Carrig 2004; Logan 2006; Rose & O'Neill 2009; Keating & O'Connor 2012; Kerins and McDonagh, 2015).

Spens (2013) proposed that the changing expectations upon schools to address the needs of a more diverse population has resulted in an expansion of the role of the SNA over time. The development of a collaborative model involving teachers and SNAs in a primary school was explored by O'Neill and Logan (2012). It was indicated by the researchers that such collaboration in planning and implementation of learning programmes brought benefits for all involved and that a review of the SNA role may be needed.

However, as suggested by Lawlor and Cregan (2003), the appointment of significant numbers of SNAs with minimal or varied qualifications and training, who are fulfilling roles of a pedagogical nature, is a matter that requires urgent attention.

It appears that the issue is predominantly in the interpretation of the SNA scheme, and specifically in relation to the use of the SNA as a “whole school resource” which may be causing such discrepancies in the role of the SNA from policy to practice. In particular it has been observed that the role of the SNA is significantly different from school to school and that the requirement of schools to manage the SNA support is potentially adding to the lack of clarity within the role of the SNA (Joint Committee on Education and Social Protection 2016).

This confusion over the role of the SNA is not unique to the Irish context, as international literature has also noted ambiguity about the role of support staff such as learning support assistants and para educators (Cremin, Thomas and Vincett, 2005; Giangreco, 2010; Webster, Blatchford, Bassett, Brown, Martin and Russell, 2010).

Allocation and management of SNA

In the same way that teachers are allocated to schools, SNAs are not allocated to individual students but to schools as a school based resource. The NCSE allocates a set number of SNA support for each school annually, taking into account the care needs of all of the students with SEN enrolled in the school who qualify on the basis of the assessed care needs, rather than solely by reference to a students disability categorization (DES, 2014). The school is in a position to manage the level of support which has been allocated to them to provide for the care needs of identified students as and when those needs arise and to provide access to SNA support for all students who have been granted access to support. There are a relatively small number of students, who for medical or sensory reasons associated with their condition, require full time care support throughout the school day. For such children, access to full day support will be provided for and this will be reflected in the schools SNA allocation. The majority of children who have care needs, however, require attention and assistance at certain times of the school day and require intermittent intervention at particular points.

SNA duties are assigned at the discretion of the Principal, or another person acting on behalf of the Principal, and/or the Board of Management of a school or VEC in accordance with Circular 0071/2011.

Importance of SNA

Whilst the role of the SNA may lack clarity and be inconsistent with policy recommendations, research has suggested that the roles which are being fulfilled by SNAs are viewed as being vitally important by parents and students with SEN in particular.

Rose et al. (2015) conducted interviews with parents of children with SEN and found that they considered the role of the SNA in supporting their child to be an extremely valuable component of SEN provision in schools. It was also found that there was concern over the level of SNA support being decreased in post primary

school as opposed to primary school and also that there was apprehension regarding the potential loss of SNA support for their children.

In the same study, Rose et al. (2015) interviewed students with SEN and concluded that overall they found SNA support to be “helpful”. Research which has been conducted internationally supports findings by Rose et al. (2015) that support staff for students with SEN significantly enhances the students experiences in school (Elliott, 2004; Giangreco, Yuan, McKenzie, Cameron and Fialka, 2005; Logan, 2006; Takala, 2007).

2.4.4 Training of SNA

The DES Circular 0021/2011 requires SNAs to have a minimum of three D’s in their Junior Certificate or FETAC Level 3 major qualification on the National Framework of Qualifications.

A survey of 2,510 SNAs conducted by the Joint Committee on Education and Social Protection (2016) indicated that the majority of SNAs surveyed possessed qualifications beyond the minimum criteria outlined in the DES circular 0021/2011. Additionally it was found that a large number of SNAs had undertaken specialist training in the area of special education, at their own expense, throughout their careers.

Overwhelmingly, SNA survey respondents felt strongly that the introduction of a standard, recognised and mandatory training course prior to working in the field would be beneficial. The majority of respondents would welcome the provision of CPD and training courses.

In the same survey, it was outlined that approximately one third of SNA respondents stated that they administered medication but conversely it was reported that the level of training which had been offered to SNAs in relation to medical administration was extremely poor.

While much of the research on SNA support in Ireland has focused on the role of the SNA, there has been a dearth of published research on the training needs of SNAs and, in particular, whether these training needs are commensurate with DES policy with regard to the role of the SNA. A lack of relevant research on the training needs for SNAs is also highlighted by Ware et al. (2009), in a study of the role of special schools and special classes in Ireland.

Chapter 3

Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter will outline the research design employed by this study to achieve its research aim. The aim of this research was to explore the roles and responsibilities of the SNA in mainstream post primary PE in relation to the inclusion of students with SEN. To achieve this research aim, five research questions were identified and used to guide the data collection and analysis within this research. The five research questions are as follows:

1. What is the profile of PE Teachers and SNAs teaching in mainstream post primary schools and what is the inclusion profile of these schools?
2. What are the key factors which promote and hinder the inclusion of students with SEN in PE?
3. What are the current roles and responsibilities of the SNA in mainstream post primary schools and what factors influence these roles, from the perspective of the SNA and PE Teacher?
4. What is the current and desired role of the SNA in promoting the inclusion of students with SEN in post primary PE, from the perspective of the SNA and PE Teacher?
5. Is there a demand for the provision of training amongst SNA's on including children with SEN in PE?

A mixed methods research design was employed for this research to answer these questions and included the use of questionnaires, focus groups and interviews. Justification for the use of a mixed methods research design, along with details of the research instruments used and data collection methods followed, will be outlined in depth in this chapter.

This chapter will begin by outlining the theoretical perspective which frames this research.

3.2 Theoretical Research Perspective

3.2.1 Research Paradigm

The way in which research is conducted and understood is undeniably influenced by one's own set of beliefs (Morgan, 2007). The popularity of paradigms as a way to summarize researchers' beliefs about their efforts to create knowledge has been directly attributed to Thomas Kuhn's landmark book titled "The Structure of Scientific Revolutions" (Kuhn, 1962). However within this book the term "research paradigm" was described as many different things and as such was criticized as lacking in clarity by fellow scholar Masterman in 1970. Kuhn went on to discuss the various application of the term "research paradigm" at length in a further "postscript" (Kuhn, 1974) and suggested that depending on the field of study the meaning and applications of the this term can vary, from paradigms as worldviews, as epistemological stances, as shared beliefs among members of a specialty area or as model examples of research (Morgan, 2007).

The most commonly used definition still stems from Kuhn's original works, with paradigms being described as the set of common beliefs and agreements shared between scientists about how problems should be understood and addressed (Kuhn, 1962). It is within this definition however, that a great significance lies on the chosen application of its concept to one's own research, which is crucial in framing the theoretical underpinning of one's chosen methodologies. It is also noteworthy to add that the assumptions associated with one paradigm over the other are neither right or wrong, but that it is the duty of a researcher to debate the significance of their chosen paradigm in relation to the methodologies they employ (Shanks, 2002).

The centrality of a research paradigm includes clarity between "what is to be studied and how the research process is to be carried out" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005a, p. 183). This section of the methodology chapter will seek to map out this research projects' process while underpinning it with the philosophical components that make up research paradigms.

3.2.1.1 Key considerations of a research paradigm

The value of the researcher taking the time to reflect upon their own philosophical assumptions of knowledge and placing themselves somewhere within the spectrum of paradigms is vital, because as Denzin and Lincoln (2005) have reminded us, paradigms “are human constructions” that “define the worldview of the researcher” (p.183). In attempting to understand one’s own research paradigm, there are four key considerations to explore:

- 1) Ontology: What is my opinion of the nature of reality?
- 2) Epistemology: How do I think that knowledge is created?
- 3) Methodology: What is the best means for acquiring knowledge?
- 4) Axiology: What ethics, values and morals are important in acquiring and presenting knowledge?

Ontology

Ontology concerns the nature of reality, for example, does a “real” objective world exist, or is reality constructed through human relationships? In research there are two key ontological assumptions, Realism and Nominalism, although perceptions of reality can exist along a continuum between the two. Realists feel that we can ‘gain access to that world by thinking, observing and recording our experiences carefully’ (Moses and Knutsen 2007, p.8) and that reality exists independently of our thinking about it. This type of ontological assumption is more typically aligned with traditional hypotheses testing research. Nominalism conversely, believes that ‘reality is socially constructed, that individuals develop subjective meanings of their own personal experience, and that this gives way to multiple meanings’ (Bloomberg and Volpe 2008, p.9). According to a nominalist assumption it is the researcher’s role to make sense of the reality which has been socially constructed through a process of interpretation of experiences and perceptions of individuals

and phenomenon's. This research aligns itself with that of a nominalist ontological view and attempts to understand the SNAs and PE teachers experiences of inclusion from their own perspectives, rather than believe that there is one singular truth and correct model of inclusion. It seeks, therefore, to use research to give voice to the individuals who make sense of and construct their own realities.

Epistemology

Epistemology is “the study of the nature of knowledge and justification” (Schwandt, 2001, p. 71). Epistemological positions are characterized by a set of assumptions about knowledge and knowing, which provide answers to the question “What and how can we know?” (Willig, 2012).

In research “Epistemology is inescapable” (Carter and Little, 2007 pp 1319). It is impossible to engage in the process of knowledge creation without already having some assumptions about what knowledge is and how it is constructed. Therefore epistemology theoretically shapes the research either by a researcher actively adopting a theory of knowledge to underpin their studies or by a less reflexive researcher implicitly adopting a theory of knowledge (Carter and Little, 2007). Furthermore epistemology is normative, in that it is the basis for explaining the rightness or wrongness, the admissibility or inadmissibility, of types of knowledge and sources of justification of that knowledge. It is for these reasons that every aspect of a research project contains epistemic content, from the methodology chosen to the methods and to the axiology or ethical decisions made within the research process and interpretation of the research data. See Figure 3.1 for a summary of this interconnected relationship.

There are two basic pillars on the continuum of epistemological assumptions although many different terms have been used to label each pillar. For the purpose of this research the terms constructivism and empiricism will be used. It must also be noted that as with all philosophical viewpoints on a continuum there are many assumptions which fall between both constructivism and empiricism.

Empiricism views reality as universal, objective, and quantifiable. It assumes that reality is the same for you as it is for me and through the application of science we can identify and 'see' what is reality. Within this assumption the individual is reduced to the status of a passive receptacle, as knowledge is seen as static and the role of the researcher is to objectively access the reality and knowledge (Ashworth, 2003).

The basic assertion of the constructionist argument is that reality is socially constructed by and between individuals who experience it (Gergen, 1999) and that reality can be different for each of us based on our experiences of the world and our own unique understandings of these experiences (Berger & Luckman, 1966). The subjectivity of reality within this epistemological stance is key.

An additional empirical stance exists which is positioned slightly between both empiricism and constructivism, called Social constructionism (Berger & Luckman, 1966; Gergen, 1999, 2001a, 2001b). Within this assumption the individual is a sense maker whom seeks to understand or make sense of their world as they see and experience it. Social constructionism allows the unique differences of people to come into focus while at the same time allowing the vital sameness that unites human beings to be identified (Ashworth, 2003). In this way each individual reality is true for the person because they are experiencing it personally but it is independent of that person due to their inability to alter it (Gergen, 1999).

This latter understanding of knowledge as being socially constructed, flexible to the individual's experiences and subject to individual reality is one which this research aligns with. The role of the researcher therefore within this study is to unveil knowledge as it happens with no pre-conceived notions of what form of experiences are expected or unexpected. The constructed knowledge surrounding inclusion in PE will be achieved from reviewing available literature across this field while the constructed insights will emerge from the perceptions of inclusion experiences collected from those at the center of the research, SNAs and PE teachers, through questionnaires, focus groups and interviews.

Methodology

As previously stated a researcher's epistemology modifies methodology and justifies the knowledge produced through data collection (see Figure 3.1) (Carter and Little 2007). A methodology is defined as "a theory and analysis of how research should proceed" (Harding 1987, p. 2), and justifies the methods used for data collection within a research project. Methods are "procedures, tools and techniques" of research (Schwandt, 2001, p. 158) which produces data and analyses from which knowledge is created. This research used a mixed methods approach and is based on the ontological and epistemological assumptions aligned with this research as outlined above. The focus was on using interpretative qualitative and quantitative methods to explore a broad spectrum of perceived realities surrounding the topic of inclusion in PE and the role of the SNA. It is in this way that this study lends itself nicely to that of a mixed methods study, with an associated paradigm to provide a theoretical framework. This is discussed in more detail in the following section.

The Simple Relationship Between Epistemology, Methodology, and Method

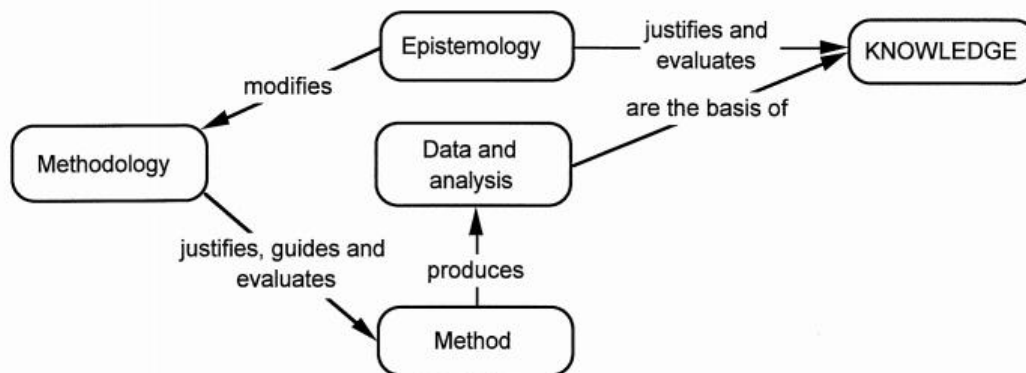


Figure 3.1 The Simple Relationship Between Epistemology, Methodology, and Method (Carter and Little 2007)

Axiology

As stated briefly above, epistemology also has ethical and values weight. Axiology relates to the values which underlie the way in which research is carried out and interpreted, because undeniably, knowledge that is generated by a project will be discussed and justified in relation to the broader cultural values of the researcher but also of the research context (Carter and Little 2007). From an epistemological viewpoint of social constructivism this becomes even more valid. A researcher who believes that individuals' experiences and knowledge are created from social interactions must be very aware of the potential impact of themselves as the researcher within this environment and how their interpretations of the research data could become a "truth" for the participants who are part of the research. The epistemological values which underlie this belief will have consequences on the role the researcher will play in the research and also on the way the data is presented and interpreted. Within this research for example caution had to be taken when conducting the focus groups and interviews not to use leading questions which may guide the participants to provide certain views about inclusion which may be similar to those of the researcher.

Researchers Background and Experiences

In addition to the four key considerations outlined above, a fifth important factor which will have an impact on the research paradigm is that of the researchers own life experiences, interests and background. The researcher in qualitative research is essentially the data collection and analysis instrument being used; therefore there is an undeniable subjectivity to the research findings produced (Bryman and Bell 2011). This, however, is not a problem once the researcher's subjective biases are declared to provide audiences with a clear view of the lens through which they are viewing their research (Merriam 1998). Therefore in this paragraph, details of the researcher's experiences and beliefs will be outlined.

My interest in the area of inclusion of people with disabilities began whilst I was completing a Bachelor of Science Degree in Sport Science and Health in Dublin

City University. During the first year and again in the third year of this degree we took a module entitled “Adapted Physical Activity (APA)”, in which we learned about various disability types and the importance of inclusion for people with disabilities in sports and physical activities. Practical classes formed a key part of this learning during the APA module and we began working directly with people with disabilities in a sports and physical activity capacity from the beginning. My original interest upon entering the sport science and health degree course was to pursue a career in the area of rehabilitation, so I already had a keen passion for working with people with disabilities but envisaged doing so in a physiotherapy and rehabilitation capacity. Over time my perception of disability changed in that my focus became less about “rehabilitating” or “fixing” disability and more about adapting the sporting and physical activity opportunities available to those with different needs to ensure all could take part at their own level. In hindsight, I can see how this shift in mind set can be clearly defined as a change from a medical model of disability to one of social or biopsychosocial model of disability. Once this interest in APA was sparked, my career and academic path followed in this direction. I went on to complete my 6 months of work experience in an APA Centre in an organization for people with intellectual disabilities, and followed my degree with a MSc in Adapted Physical Activity. During my MSc I got the opportunity to work in a variety of different settings in Belgium and the US. My time in the US was a real turning point for me in relation to how I viewed inclusion in general, but specifically in education. Whilst in Virginia I spent 3 months working alongside Adapted Physical Education (APE) teachers in Elementary and High Schools. The contrast in the inclusive education environment in the USA in comparison to what I had known in Ireland was an eye opener. Special schools did not exist in Virginia and all students, regardless of ability, were educated in the same school environment with additional supports brought into the school to allow for them to be included. One such support was that of the APE teachers whom I worked alongside and also para educators (equivalent to SNA’s in Irish context) which often worked alongside the APE teachers. My viewpoint altered to a belief that full inclusion can work and is to the benefit of all involved once the right supports are in

place. My beliefs in this regard resonates with the landmark quote “ Unless our children begin to learn together, there is little hope that our people will ever learn to live together.” (Justice Thurgood Marshall, *Milliken V Bradley* 1974). On completion of my Masters I worked as a lecturer in the area of APA and as a Sports Inclusion Disability Officer along with organising and delivering many community based sports and physical activity programmes for children and adults with disabilities. My interest in the area of inclusion in PE stems from the positive influence of inclusion that I witnessed in Virginia but also from the belief that education forms a major part of children’s youth and thus has a big impact on whether they will or will not lead physically active lives as adults. Therefore it is my belief that positive inclusion experiences in schools are crucial to creating positive inclusion experiences in society.

The decision to focus this research specifically on the role of the SNA in PE was due to a fundamental belief that there is great potential for these professionals to have a profound effect on the inclusion of students with SEN in education in general. Furthermore, in PE in particular I feel that SNAs can have a tremendous impact on the participation and inclusion of students with SEN. With a dearth of research the role of paraeducators in PE internationally and no research on the role of the SNA specifically, I felt this was an area which warrants investigation.

3.2.2 Research paradigm categories

With the epistemological and ontological assumptions for the research having been examined, detail will now be given in relation to the chosen paradigms which are most aligned with this particular research project.

Flick (2009) provided a helpful guide to paradigms by presenting the four categories of paradigms and the associated methodologies employed within each paradigm, this can be seen in table 3.1.

Table 3.1 Four main paradigms and associated methodologies

Post Positivist	Constructivist	Transformative	Pragmatic
Quantitative	Qualitative	Action Research	Mixed Methods
Experimental	Naturistic	Critical theory	Mixed Models
Quasi-experimental	Interpretative	Neo-Marxist	Participatory
Co-relational	Phenomenological	Feminist Theory	
Causal	Hermeneutic	Critical race theory	
comparative	Symbolic interaction	Freire an	
Randomized control	Ethnographic	Participatory	
Trials	Participatory action research	Emancipatory	
		Postcolonial/Indigenous	
		Queer theory	
		Disability theories	

(Adapted from Flick2009, p.8)

Although this research is most closely aligned with a pragmatic paradigm (due to use of mixed methods), elements of post positivist and constructivist paradigms also permeate the research thus require discussion. The next section briefly explains the four main paradigms and considers their impact on this research.

In early educational and psychological research the main paradigms that dominated studies were positivism and post positivism.

3.2.2.1 Post-positivism

The underlying assumption of positivism is that of realism. The perspective of positivism is that knowledge is viewed as being tangible and objective with positivist researchers examining obtainable proof and making certain and objective assumptions based on that proof. Positivist researchers are conscious that “great precision is necessary on the part of the scientist to verify conclusions” (Emden and Sandelowski, 1999, p.2). Post-positivists rejected that only directly observable phenomena could be studied, believing that researchers should “modify their claims to understandings of truth based on probability, rather than certainty” (Flick 2009, p.12). As a result of this new paradigm, research methods allowing measurement of phenomenon which were previously considered as being too subjective by positivists emerged. Within this current research the influence of the post positivist paradigm is evident through the use of questionnaires to measure perceptions of SNAs and PE teachers in post-primary schools across Ireland towards inclusion in PE.

3.2.2.2 Constructivism

Conversely to positivism and post positivism, constructivism, which is rooted in the nominalist philosophy, makes the assumption that those active in the research process are responsible for socially constructing knowledge. The belief is that people organize experiences to be able to understand them regardless of any preliminary reality. In this way the social reality is subjective (Egon, Guba and Lincoln, 2001). This paradigm suggests that researchers should try to comprehend the multifaceted nature of lived experiences from the viewpoint of those who live it (Schwandt 2000) and seek to comprehend how “the individual created, modifies and interprets the world” (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2004, p.7). A constructivist approach can be seen in this research project through the use of focus groups and semi structured interviews, which were conducted in an attempt to gain further understanding of the research participants lived experiences of inclusion in PE and the role of the SNA.

3.2.2.3 *Pragmatism*

As exemplified in the above descriptions of paradigms, some assumptions and applications were taken from various paradigms in order to best answer the research questions of this project. It has been suggested that once a researcher does not ignore their own worldview it is not essential to function just within one paradigm or to conduct research which is driven by a paradigm (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2004) but rather to focus on the research questions at hand and how to answer them most productively while staying true to your own epistemology.

The mixing of paradigms in this way has been referred to as pragmatism, and it would be most accurate to state therefore that this research project is embedded in a pragmatic paradigm. Morgan (2007) supports this type of approach to research arguing that a pragmatic approach allows the positive aspects of all paradigms to work together and uses all methods needed to solve the research problem being explored.

Additional scholars have also advocated for this pragmatic approach stating that it 'sidesteps the contentious issues of truth and reality and orients itself towards solving practical problems in the real world' (Feilzer 2009 p.8).

This research project was undertaken from the perspective that paradigms and methods can be combined in order to ensure that the phenomenon under investigation can be reported in a manner that places the findings of the research and the possible theories that can be generated to the fore. As qualitative and quantitative methods both have positive and negative components, it was envisaged that combining both would allow for the positive aspects to be maximised and the negative aspect to be minimised.

3.3 Mixed Methods Methodology

The following sections will review the use of qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods research as well as discussing the data collection methods employed for this research. The current research employed a mixed methods approach.

3.3.1 Qualitative research

Researchers assuming qualitative perspectives are interested in understanding individuals' perceptions of the world.

Campbell (1997, p.122) defines qualitative research as:

“An inquiry process based on building a holistic, complex understanding of a social problem. It is characterized by data collection in a natural setting where the researcher acts as a key instrument. Furthermore, the research contains deep, rich description and is more concerned with process than specifying outcomes or products.”

The people being studied are at the core of all events for qualitative researchers and consequently person to person interaction is often used as the primary method of data collection. Additionally, Punch draws our attention to another important distinction, which is that:

‘qualitative research not only uses non-numerical and unstructured data but also, typically, has research questions and methods which are more general at the start, and become more focused as the study progresses’ (Punch 2005, p28).

It must be noted that limitations exist within qualitative research. These limitations have been well documented and are summarized by Bryman and Bell (2011) as follows:

- 1) The research can be too subjective
- 2) The research can be difficult to replicate

- 3) There can be problems of generalization
- 4) There can be a lack of transparency

Subjectivity

It has been suggested that qualitative research relies too much on the researchers “often unsystematic views of what is significant and important” (Bryman and Bell 2011, p408). Due to the nature of the qualitative researcher being the research tool that both collects and analyses the data through interpretation, there is undoubted opportunity for researcher bias and an ultimate portrayal of findings which is selective and subjective. This contrasts to quantitative data which is objectively derived from findings through statistics and validated tests.

Difficulty with replication

It is often argued that precisely because of the subjectivity of qualitative data and the researcher being the tool of enquiry as outlined above, that there are innate difficulties with the true replication of a qualitative study. Bryman and Bell (2011) point out the difficulties of the researcher being the research tool, in relation to allowing replication of research, as follows:

- 1) The specific areas a researcher chooses to focus on during data collection, i.e topics which are pursued in focus groups and interviews or observations emphasized in ethnography studies
- 2) The responses of the research participants to the characteristics of the researcher
- 3) The subjectivity of the interpretation of data by the researcher varying based on their own experiences, interests and personal characteristics.

Problems with Generalization

It is often insinuated that the findings from a qualitative research study are restricted to the specific research context from which they were drawn. In other words it is argued that findings derived from a small sample of participants in a qualitative study cannot be generalized to other settings or be truly representative of the general population being studied due to the issues discussed above and the other varying factors within populations and research contexts. In addition to this, the issue of sample size generally being smaller in qualitative research in comparison to quantitative research can also lead to doubts over the representativeness or generalizability of the findings to populations. Qualitative researchers however would argue that such findings are to “*generalize to theory rather than to populations*” and that it is the “*quality of theoretical inferences that are made out of qualitative data that is crucial to the assessment of generalization*” (Bryman and Bell 2011, p.409).

Lack of Transparency

In comparison to the sometimes “laborious accounts” (Bryman and Bell, 2011, p.409) of quantitative research the research procedures followed by qualitative researchers can, at times, appear to be unclear and lack transparency in relation to how participants were selected and how, and under what conditions, data was analyzed. A rigorous outline of the procedures followed through all phases of the research process can help to delineate these concerns around lack of transparency.

3.3.2 Quantitative Research

Creswell (2009 p.4) describes quantitative research as ‘a means of testing objective theories by examining the relationship among variables. These variables, in turn, can be measured, typically on instruments, so that numbered data can be analysed using statistical procedures’. Quantitative researchers gather facts or

data and examine the association of these sets to another (Bell and Waters, 2014). Through the use of predefined research questions and research designs (Punch 2005), they use methods that are probable to generate quantified and ideally generalizable conclusions (Bell and Waters, 2014).

A number of assumptions form the basis of quantitative approaches. Firstly, it is assumed that patterns exist in nature and can be seen and explained. Secondly, it is assumed that through the use of empirical methods, statements about the patterns which exist can be made. Thirdly, it is assumed that distinctions can be made between value-laden statements and factual ones (Moses and Knutsen, 2007).

Those who are critical of this approach strongly challenge these assumptions. They contend that even if the world exists independently of the observer, the observer's knowledge of the world does not. Consequently they believe that there are very few absolute 'facts' in social science. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2004) maintain that life cannot be described exclusively in measurable terms and that the pursuit for objectivity isolates us from ourselves and from nature.

Bryman and Bell (2011) provide a summary of the criticisms towards quantitative research which help to point out some of the limitations of this form of research over qualitative research. Firstly, they contend that quantitative researchers fail to differentiate people and social institutions from "the world of nature" (p.167). In other words, they do not take into account the fact that people can interpret the world around them and have a capacity for self-reflection in comparison to the objects in natural science which can be studied in more homogeneous manner. In addition to this they state that the measurement process holds an "artificial and spurious sense of precision and accuracy" (p.168). This is to suggest that the tools which are used to measure concepts in social science are assumed rather than real, in other words the precision with which they can measure what they are supposed to measure is questionable as the level of interpretation by the subjects taking the tests (questionnaires for example) is assumed to be identical.

Furthermore, they assert that the reliance on instruments and procedures obstructs

the connection between research and everyday life, in other words people may answer a questionnaire designed to measure their daily physical activity levels but respondents actual physical activity behavior in daily life may be inconsistent with the answers they provided. Finally Bryman and Bell (2011 p.168) declare that “The analysis of relationships between variables creates a static view of social life that is independent of people’s lives“ , Within this it is suggested that quantitative research takes an objective ontology towards the social world that does not take account of the impact of the process of interpretation and produced realities which occur within human groups.

3.3.3 Mixed Methods research

Mixed methods research endeavors to combine the best of both worlds by respecting the multiple beliefs and perspectives of qualitative and quantitative approaches (Guba and Lincoln, 2005). Creswell (2008) has documented the strengths of mixed methods research such as the fact that quantitative and qualitative data together offer a superior understanding of the research problem and that one type of research is often not adequate to answer the research question fully.

Furthermore mixed methods can allow for a greater understanding of research phenomena because one method can complement and enhance the other, therefore lessening the limitations associated with the primary method (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie and Turner 2007).

It has been declared therefore that mixed methods can create arguments that form the basis for well-founded social theory (Mason 2006).

Having now justified and validated the reasons for employing a mixed methods research methodology, what remains is to make careful consideration around three other factors:

- 1) the timing of the use of collected data

- 2) the relative weight of the quantitative and qualitative approaches
- 3) the approach to mixing the two datasets

Timing can also be referred to as sequencing and it refers to the temporal relationship between the quantitative and qualitative components within a research project (Green et al., 1989). Timing is often discussed in relation to the time the datasets are collected but it is more important to consider the order in which the data will be used by the researcher (Morgan 1998). Timing in mixed methods design is classified in one of two ways: concurrent or sequential (Morse, 1991). In this research project data was collected sequentially with quantitative data being collected first through questionnaires, followed by qualitative data through focus groups and semi-structured interviews. The rationale for doing this sequentially was so the questionnaire data could inform the interview questions asked.

Weighting refers to the relative importance or priority of the quantitative and qualitative methods to answering the research questions, referred to as the “priority decision” (Morgan, 1998). Data collection measures can either be of equal weighting or dominant weighting can be given to one data collection method over the other. It has been suggested the theoretical worldview used to guide the research project will determine whether the qualitative or quantitative data will get more weighting in the project. In the case of this research it is the quantitative data which is given more weighting with the qualitative data being used in a supporting and explanatory role. See figure 4 to illustrate choice in timing and weighting for mixed methods research design. This figure illustrates the different approaches that can be taken with regard to timing and weighting for mixed methods research designs. Qualitative and quantitative data can be collected and analysed concurrently (at the same time) or sequentially, with either qualitative methods coming first or quantitative methods. In addition to this there can be a dominant status of focus on either qualitative methods or quantitative methods, or both methods can be employed equally throughout the research.

Figure 3.2 Timing and Weighting decisions for mixed methods research design

		Time Order Decision	
		Concurrent	Sequential
Paradigm Emphasis Decision	Equal Status	QUAL + QUAN	QUAL → QUAN QUAN → QUAL
	Dominant Status	QUAL + quan QUAN + qual	QUAL → quan qual → QUAN QUAN → qual quan → QUAL

Note. "qual" stands for qualitative, "quan" stands for quantitative, "+" stands for concurrent, "→" stands for sequential, capital letters denote high priority or weight, and lower case letters denote lower priority or weight.¹¹

In relation to mixing of the data, Creswell et al., (2011) identified six separate mixed method research approaches. These include the convergence parallel design, the explanatory sequential design, the exploratory sequential design, the embedded design, the transformative design and the multiphase design.

Sequential mixed methods designs comprise of many stages of data collection with the specific sequence being determined by the research purpose (Andrew & Halcomb, 2009). Sequential designs may be explanatory, in which the quantitative data is collected first and then the qualitative data, or exploratory, whereby the qualitative data is collected first and followed by the quantitative part of the study (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2007). It has been suggested that the weight is usually given to the quantitative element of the research in explanatory designs whereas in exploratory designs the weight is usually afford to the qualitative aspect (Andrew and Halcomb 2009).

This research study chose to employ an explanatory sequential design whereby the quantitative data was collected first, in the form of the questionnaires, followed

by the qualitative data collection through follow up focus groups and interviews. The purpose of the qualitative data in this study is to further explain and interpret the findings from the quantitative data and thus the priority focus is on the quantitative data. For example, the questionnaires in this study were used to collect quantitative data from a large number of SNAs and PE teachers, which was assumed to be representative of the general perceptions amongst this population in Ireland. Following on from this, participants who completed the questionnaires were invited for interviews where their responses could be further explored. The rationale that quantitative data would offer a general understanding of a research problem, followed by the qualitative data refining and explaining the statistical results through an exploration of participants' views, is well documented in the literature (Rossman and Wilson 1985; Tashakkori and Teddlie 1998; Creswell 2003).

The strengths of this design include its straightforwardness and the provision of opportunities for the exploration of quantitative results in more detail, while the limitations of the design are that it is time and resource consuming to collect and analyze both types of data, particularly at different time points (Creswell, Goodchild, and Turner 1996; Green and Caracelli 1997; Creswell 2003, 2005; Moghaddam, Walker, and Harre 2003; Ivankova, Creswell and Stick, 2006). See Appendices A for a full overview of the model of data collection and analysis using the Mixed Methods sequential explanatory design.

The rationale for mixing both kinds of data within one study is based on the perception that neither quantitative nor qualitative methods alone would be enough to encapsulate the trends and details of a phenomenon. Using quantitative and qualitative methods together in one study takes advantage of the strengths of each type of data and complements each other to allow for a more thorough analysis (Ivankoca, Creswell and Stick year; Green, Caracelli, and Graham 1989; Miles and Huberman 1994; Green and Caracelli 1997; Tashakkori and Teddlie 1998). Using more than one method or source of data in the study of social phenomenon can be referred to as triangulation and researchers have suggested that this approach

results in greater confidence in findings (Webb et al., 1966 cited in Bryman and Bell, 2011, p.396) as each source of data can be used as a check against the other allowing for a greater understanding of the complex social phenomenon being studied (Kanter, 1997).

While the main research question under investigation in this research relates to human perception and thus would seem to most naturally lend itself to qualitative methods such as focus groups and interviews, in order to try to establish an overview of the broader trends in the national population of SNAs and PE teachers working in mainstream post-primary schools, it was necessary to firstly use quantitative methods in the form of questionnaires followed by qualitative methods to provide more in depth insights.

3.3.4 Validity and Reliability

Bryman (2004) asserts that research, whether qualitative or quantitative, must address the issues of validity and reliability, or authenticity and trustworthiness as often referred to for qualitative research.

3.3.4.1 Validity

The terms validity, credibility, trustworthiness and authenticity are used interchangeably by various researchers (Sarantakos 2005) but it has been suggested by Kincheloe & Mc Larens (1998) that the term trustworthiness may be more suitable for use with qualitative research.

Validity is concerned with whether our research is believable and true, and whether it is evaluating what it sets out to evaluate. As Merriam (1998 p. 202), states in qualitative research “reality is holistic, multidimensional and ever-changing.”. The principles underlying the validity of qualitative research therefore are grounded on the fact that the researcher builds trustworthiness, utility and dependability into the

different phases of the research, from data collection to interpretation (Zohrabi 2013).

The following procedures can be used in research to validate the instruments used to collect data and the interpretation of the data.

Internal Validity

Internal validity attempts to validate the similarity between the research findings and reality, and also determines whether the researcher measures what is supposed to be measured (Zohrabi 2013). Merriam (1998) recommends six methods which can be applied to boost the internal validity of research data and instruments: triangulation, member checks, long-term observation at research site, peer examination, participatory or collaborative modes of research and researcher's bias. This research used triangulation through the use of three different methodological tools (Questionnaires, Interviews and Focus Groups), which helps to enhance the knowledge received and increase accuracy, credibility (Flick 2006) and validity (Denzin 1978) of the data collected. Member checking between the researcher and participants of the focus groups and interviews was also used to ensure internal validity was achieved. This was achieved by reading out the main points to the participants, which were noted by the researcher during the focus groups and interviews at the end of each session. The potential for researcher bias was acknowledged throughout the research procedure and the researcher remained reflexive upon their own beliefs and the impact this may have on the interpretation of data along with the interviewing techniques being employed.

Content Validity

Content validity attempts to ensure that different elements, skills and behaviors are adequately and effectively measured via the data collection instruments used (Zohrabi, 2013).

Within this research content validity was ensured by having the questionnaires reviewed by experts in the field prior to dissemination. The questionnaire was also piloted. Based on reviewers and pilot study participants comments, the questionnaire was revised to ensure clarity and validity. Questions and topics for the interviews and focus groups were also reviewed by experts in the field and piloted prior to dissemination..

3.3.4.2 Reliability

Reliability is concerned with the “*consistency, dependability and replicability*” of the results gathered during research (Zohrabi 2013, p. 259). There are two types of reliability which need to be fulfilled; External Reliability and Internal Reliability. External reliability is interested in the replication of the study: “Could an independent researcher reproduce the study and obtain results similar to the original study?” (Burns 1999, p. 21). Internal Reliability however, deals with the consistency of collecting, analyzing and interpreting the data: “Would the same results be obtained by other researchers using the same analysis?” (Burns 1999, p. 21).

Achieving similar results in quantitative research is quite easy because the data is in numerical form. However, in qualitative research this can be a lot more difficult as the data is in narrative form and subjective, to both the participants and the researcher. Therefore, Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommend that we think about the dependability and consistency of qualitative data rather than attempting to obtain the same results. Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Merriam (1998) propose that dependability can be achieved through the use of three techniques: the investigator’s position, triangulation and audit trial.

The investigator should elaborate every aspect of the study by explaining the different processes and phases of the inquiry and should outline in detail the rationale of the study, design of the study and the participants (Zohrabi, 2013). This research adheres to this recommendation by outlining this detail within this chapter. As outlined above, this research used various methods to collect data

which ensured triangulation of the data so that various types of information was gained allowing for greater dependability and consistency. It is recommended that the researcher describes in detail how the data are collected, how they are analyzed, how different themes are derived and how the results are obtained so that the research can be replicated. Again this methods chapter outlines all of this detail.

The next section will detail the qualitative and quantitative methods employed during this research.

3.4 Research Methods

It is important for any research study that the methods selected are both adequate to answer the research questions and appropriate for the research methodology being employed. Having reviewed previous and related research studies, a combination of questionnaires and follow up focus groups and interviews were deemed the most appropriate methods for use during this research study. Barton and Thomlinson (1981) and Haug (1998) support the use of interviews in order to tackle critically the inherent assumptions and contradictions of research with questionnaires. Therefore, the combination of questionnaires followed by focus group and semi-structured interviews allowed the research questions to be explored in more depth.

3.4.1 Data Collection Methods

The 3 data collection methods employed for this research were questionnaires, focus groups and interviews.

Questionnaire

“A questionnaire is a method for collecting primary data in which a sample of respondents are asked a list of carefully structured questions chosen after considerable testing with a view to eliciting reliable responses.” (Collis and Hussey, 2014, p.205). Questionnaires can be used in a number of different settings

including interviews, by telephone, online and postal. For this research a combination of online and postal questionnaires were used. The questionnaire used in this research was developed by the researcher based on a version of a questionnaire used by Davis et al. (2007) which examined the responsibilities and training needs of paraeducators in PE in the USA. The questionnaire was subjected to a number of amendments before being used for this research to ensure it was applicable to the Irish research environment and context, including the alignment with the roles of the SNA rather than that of the paraeducator.

Other sources which guided the choice of questions on the questionnaire included a review of the literature in the area of inclusion in PE (Sweeney and Coulter, 2008; Chandler & Green, 1995; La Master, Gall, Kinchin & Siedentop, 1998, Block 2003; Meegan and MacPhail, 2006b) along with Department of Education published documents on the role of the SNA in post primary education (DES, 2011).

Two different questionnaires were designed for SNAs and PE teachers with many similar questions on both, using multiple-choice, likert scale and dichotomous (yes/no) questions. Survey Monkey was used for the development of the online version of the questionnaire. See appendices B and C for a copy of the SNA and PE teacher questionnaire used in this research.

Content validity of the questionnaire was determined by a two-step process consisting of written comments from higher education professionals (n=3) and the completion of a 6-item modified validity rating form (See appendices D for a copy of the form used) by a sample (n=11) of SNAs (Thomas and Nelson 1996).

Missing Data

Missing data is very common in quantitative research using questionnaires due to issues with item non-response (Dong and Peng 2013). Item non-response occurs when the respondent does not respond to certain questions due to stress, fatigue or lack of knowledge. The respondent may not respond because some

questions are sensitive. These lack of answers are considered missing values or data.

Enders (2003) stated that a missing data rate of 15% to 20% was common in educational and psychological studies; furthermore Peng et al. (2006) found that 48% of quantitative studies published from 1998 to 2004 had missing data.

To account for missing data in this research, missing values analysis was conducted using SPSS version 22. All data analysis was then conducted using valid percentages which excluded missing values and the missing values percentage for questions was reported with the presentation of the results.

Focus groups

Focus groups and interviews sought to explore the role of the SNA and inclusion in PE by using the findings which emerged from the questionnaire data as a guide.

Focus Groups are “used to gather data relating to the feelings and opinions of a group of people who are involved in a common situation or discussing the same phenomenon” (Collis and Hussey, 2014, p.141). Using interview style techniques, groups of participants are encouraged by a group leader or researcher to discuss their opinions on selected topics. The advantage of focus groups as opposed to interviews is the addition of the effect that the group interaction can have on topics being discussed. For example, through listening to others views being expressed participants can be stimulated to voice their own opinions, which they may not have done without this group interaction (Morgan, 1997). The purpose of a focus group is not to obtain data which can be generalized about a whole population but rather to obtain as full a range of perceptions about a specific phenomenon as is possible (Collis and Hussey, 2014). In the context of this research, the focus groups aimed to provide additional insights and depth to the findings of the questionnaires and so the questions and topic chosen were based on findings that were considered important and pertinent to the study from the questionnaire data.

Semi-structured interviews

Interviews are a method of collecting information from selected participants through asking questions to find out what they do, think or feel. Under an interpretivist paradigm interviews seek to explore “data on understandings, opinions, what people remember doing, attitudes, feelings and the like, that people have in common” (Arksey and Knight, 1999, p.2) and will be unstructured or semi structured (Collis and Hussey (2014). During interviews open questions which require longer and more developed answers, rather than yes/no answers, can be used, or closed questions which require very brief factual answers. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in this research, whereby participants were encouraged to talk about specific topics of interest through the use of open ended questions but allowed for other questions to emerge during the course of the interview depending on the responses given by the participants. Probing questions were also used during the interviews and focus groups to ensure that participants elaborated on topics which were of particular interest to the research questions being explored.

Telephone interviews

Due to logistical purposes, a number of the semi structured interviews conducted for this research were carried out by telephone. Telephone interviews have become an increasingly utilized method of collecting data in a variety of fields (Thomas and Purdon 1994; Ryan et al. 2001; Dicker and Gilbert 1988; Wilson and Edwards 2003; Glogowska, Young and Lockyer 2011). Wilson and Edwards (2003) explored the advantages surrounding the use of telephone interviews in educational settings and the difficulties which can be encountered. They stated the disadvantages could include establishing rapport with the respondent and recognising limitations of resulting data but felt that overall the advantages such as cost and flexibility outweighed the disadvantages. Additional research exists to suggest that data obtained through telephone interviews are no less valid than those obtained in face-to-face interviews (Herzog et al. 1983; Smith 2005).

Guidelines exist in the literature also in relation to improving data quality during telephone interviews (Wilson and Edwards 2003; Smith 2005; Dicker and Gilbert 1988; Glogowska, Young and Lockyer 2011). Such guidelines were followed during this research study including the following:

- Making a favourable start by introducing yourself and the information about the study along with establishing consent from the respondent.
- Contacting the participant before telephoning them to outline the details of the research and ensuring they are willing to participate and establishing a time to call that suits them, cold calling for example was avoided.
- Ensuring that ethical guidelines are followed and that the participants are given, or read to, a plain language statement and allowed the opportunity to give consent for participation.
- Having a written script of the questions to ask to ensure the interview runs smoothly is important to guarantee professionalism.
- Allowing sufficient time for each telephone interview for debriefing and for expanded conversations so that the participant does not feel rushed.

The interviewer for this research used a script to introduce herself, to remind respondents about the study and to establish the consent of the respondent to participate, asking permission to be audio-taped and explaining how the data would be prepared and analysed once collected. She also contacted all participants by email and text message before making the telephone call.

Issues with interviews and focus groups

As with all data collection methods, interview and focus groups have some potential problems which the researcher must be aware of. One such problem which can occur is social desirability bias, whereby participants will answer in the way they feel the researcher would like them too, (Collis and Hussey, 2014).

Another common problem with focus groups is having one participant who is overly dominant, making it difficult for others to express their opinions. The role of the researcher here is vital in firstly explaining the way in which the focus group will be conducted to all participants prior to its commencement and secondly by maintaining control of the group and encouraging all participants to contribute throughout. Being aware of these potential problems prior to data collection is vital for the researcher in order to conduct the focus groups and interviews to the highest standard.

3.4.2 Research Participants and research protocol

Participants

The participants for this research consisted of SNAs and PE teachers who were working in mainstream post-primary schools.

Questionnaire Participants

One hundred and ninety three PE teachers took part in the questionnaire research. These participants were comprised of 43% Males and 55% Females, with an average age of 36 years and an average of 12 years teaching experience. The geographical spread of schools that PE teacher participants from this research worked in was distributed across 23 counties with the majority being located in Dublin (25%).

The number of SNAs that took part in the questionnaire research was 330. These participants were comprised of 6.4% Males and 91.2% Females. The average age of the SNAs was 46.7 years and the average years of experience working as an SNA was 7.9 years. The geographical spread of schools that SNA participants from this research worked in was distributed across 26 counties with the majority being located in Dublin (29%).

Focus Groups Participants

The number of focus group participants was 22 SNAs. These participants were comprised of 20 females and 2 males with all of the participants working in schools in Dublin (n=22).

No PE teachers took part in the focus groups, this was due to 2 reasons. First, the scope of this research meant that SNA's were the primary focus. Therefore, the researchers determined that additional information through the remit of focus groups or interviews needed to be gathered from the SNA rather than the PE teacher population. Second, given the amount of data collected from the questionnaires and SNA focus groups, time constraints impeded the addition of focus groups with PE teachers. .

Interview Participants

The number of interview participants was 6 SNAs. No PE Teachers took part in the interviews due to the aforementioned reasons. These participants were comprised of 6 females and no males. The participants worked in schools in Kildare (n=4), Cavan (n=1) and Dublin (n=1).

Recruitment and Procedure

Sampling

To recruit participants for this research, statistics available from the NCSE (2013) containing a list of post primary schools who were allocated an SNA for 2014/15 were used to identify school names and addresses. It was identified that 2,185 SNAs were employed in post primary schools at this time in 732 post primary schools around Ireland. A letter outlining the research along with copies of the questionnaires for both SNAs and PE teachers and consent forms were sent to each of these schools for the attention of the SEN co-ordinator or resource teacher.

An option was given at the end of each questionnaire to provide contact details if the participant was willing to participate in further research on this topic. All participants who completed this information and were located in the Leinster region were contacted via email to determine if they were available to take part in follow up interviews or focus groups. Follow up text messages were also sent to participants to determine if they were interested in taking part.

Questionnaires

Two questionnaires, one for PE teachers and one for SNAs, were posted to all mainstream post-primary schools in Ireland who employed SNAs (n=732 Schools), according to the NCSE School Allocations List from 2014/15 (See Appendices E). The number of SNAs allocated to these schools in total was n=2,185. These questionnaires were addressed to SEN Coordinators in each school with a cover letter explaining the research and asking the coordinators to distribute the questionnaires to all SNAs and PE Teachers working in their schools. A stamped addressed envelope was included for each of the questionnaires so that participants could return their completed questionnaires individually rather than collectively from each school.

Links to an online version of the questionnaire were also emailed to the schools and to SNA union mailing lists, which had been obtained from IMPACT Trade Union. Follow up phone calls were made to SEN coordinators in the schools two weeks after initially sending the questionnaires in an attempt to increase response rate.

Interviews and Focus Groups

Follow up focus groups (n=5) and semi structured interviews (n=6) were conducted with a total of 28 SNAs (Focus Groups n=22, Interviews n=6), who had completed the questionnaires and who had completed a section of the questionnaire stating they would be willing to partake in further research.

A purposive sample of n=100 SNAs from around Ireland, that participated in the questionnaire research and had provided contact email addresses, were contacted by email and invited to take part in the follow up focus groups and interviews. The emails were followed up with a SMS to mobile numbers provided ten days after the initial email. Of the n=100 SNAs contacted, n=22 declined participation in the focus groups and interviews and n=50 did not respond to the emails. See table 3.3 below for a breakdown of this sample.

Table 3.3. Outline of sample of SNAs contacted to participate in the interviews and focus groups

County	Number of SNAs contacted (100)	SNAs who agreed to participate (28)	SNAs who declined participation (22)	SNAs who didn't respond (50)
Dublin	49	23	6	20
Cavan	4	1	1	2
Meath	12	-	3	9
Westmeath	7	-	-	7
Tipperary	5	-	2	3
Waterford	4	-	-	4
Monaghan	3	-	3	-
Wexford	2	-	-	2
Louth	6	-	3	3
Kildare	8	4	4	-

Due to logistics and time constraints, SNAs who could not attend a focus group but who had expressed their wish to be involved be involved in the research, agreed to participate in semi-structured phone-interviews instead (n=5).

The focus groups were facilitated by the primary researcher for this project and a Final Year Project (FYP) student of the DCU BSc. Sport Science and Health, for whom the researcher acted as a second supervisor.

The themes which emerged from the questionnaire were used by the researcher to determine the questions and guide topics for the interviews and focus groups. These guidelines were provided to the FYP student in relation to conducting the focus groups and interviews (See Appendices F for a copy of the focus group and interview schedules). A pilot focus group was conducted between the primary researcher, the FYP student and 4 SNAs from a local school, to ensure consistency in the approaches and procedures followed for the focus groups and interviews. See Table 3.4 for a breakdown of the number of participants in each focus group, the mode of interview conducted (Phone/Face to Face) and the moderator/interviewer for each.

Table 3.4 Details of Focus Groups and Interviews Conducted

Focus Group/Interview	Number of Participants	Moderator
Focus Group	4	Primary Researcher
Focus Group	5	Primary Researcher
Focus Group	5	Primary Researcher
Focus Group	4	FYP Student
Focus Group	4	FYP Student
Face to Face Interview	1	Primary Researcher
Phone Interview	1	FYP Student
Phone Interview	1	FYP Student
Phone Interview	1	FYP Student
Phone Interview	1	FYP Student
Phone Interview	1	FYP Student

All participants were given a plain language statement and informed consent form to sign prior to commencing the focus group. Two focus groups took place in the Business building in DCU, both consisting of four SNAs from various schools. The remaining three focus groups took place in two schools in Dublin and comprised of the SNAs from each of the schools respectively. Each focus group lasted one hour and was recorded on a Dictaphone.

One Face to Face semi structured interview was conducted in the home of a SNA who worked in a local school. This participant received a plain language statement and an informed consent form to sign prior to commencing the interview. This interview lasted approximately 1 hour and was recorded on a Dictaphone.

Five semi-structured telephone interviews were set up for those who wanted to take part in the research but could not travel to DCU to attend the focus group discussions. These were conducted by the FYP student who was set up in a room in DCU with the telephone on loudspeaker and the Dictaphone in use to record the session. In order to secure consent, participants were read a plain language statement before the interview began. Each semi-structured interview lasted approximately an hour long.

In keeping with the concept of member checking, at the end of each focus group and semi-structured phone interview, the researcher summarised the key pieces of information that had been discussed by the SNAs, ensuring the information was accurate. Participants were given the opportunity to agree or disagree with the information which was relayed to them at this stage.

Ethics

Ethics can be defined as

“A set of standards by which a particular group or community decides to regulate its behavior- to distinguish what is legitimate or acceptable in pursuit of their aims from what is not” (Flew, 1979, p.112)

Sarantkos (2005) recommends that to ensure research is ethical, the researcher should provide sufficient information on the type of questions being asked, the degree of sensitivity and the consequences of the questions. The researcher must ensure the welfare of the participants by paying attention to safety, personal embarrassment and physical and mental health. Informed consent outlining the research should be provided to all participants. In this study all participants received plain language statements and informed consent and were afforded the opportunity to ask questions or to decline participation in the research. The researcher also has a responsibility to recognize the participant's right to privacy, anonymity and that all information about them remain confidential. All participants

of this research were assigned participant ID numbers and names were removed from the transcripts and replaced with alias names.

This research was granted ethical approval by DCU Research Ethics Committee in January 2009, reference number DCUREC/2012/238 (Appendix G).

3.4.3 Data Analysis

This research employed a mixed methods design using quantitative approaches to analyse the questionnaire data and qualitative approaches to explore the themes from the focus groups and interviews. As stated previously the quantitative analysis took place initially followed by the qualitative data analysis. The questionnaire data was inputted into Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (IBM Statistics SPSS Version 22) and was screened and cleaned before being analysed using descriptive statistics, including frequency and percentage response distributions and measures of central tendency.

Using the initial descriptive statistics analysis of the questionnaire data, interview topics were chosen for the qualitative stage of the data collection. The interviews and focus groups were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim before being entered into Nvivo software, where the data was coded and analysed using thematic analysis with an emphatic interpretation orientation. Verification procedures as per Ivankova, Creswell and Stick (2005) were followed including; member checking, intercoder agreement, rich and thick descriptions of the cases, reviewing and resolving disconfirming evidence, and academic adviser's auditing.

The methods of data analysis used and the procedures followed will be outlined in greater detail below.

3.4.3.1. Quantitative Data Analysis

The questionnaire data was analysed quantitatively using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 22. Descriptive and inferential statistics were conducted on the quantitative data. Descriptive statistics try to illustrate the

relationship between variables in a sample or population. Descriptive statistics give a summary of data in the form of mean, median and mode. Inferential statistics use a random sample of data taken from a population to describe and make inferences about the whole population (Satake, 2015).

Statistical tests were conducted to measure for relationships and differences between the variables. Statistical significance was accepted at $p < 0.05$ for all tests.

Data from the questionnaires were analyzed using both parametric and non-parametric tests depending on the variables being analyzed. Parametric tests were used to analyze numerical data that are normally distributed. The two most basic prerequisites for parametric statistical analysis are:

- The assumption of normality which specifies that the means of the sample group are normally distributed
- The assumption of equal variance which specifies that the variances of the samples and of their corresponding population are equal. (Altman 2009).

However, when the assumptions of normality were not met, and the sample means were not normally distributed, non-parametric tests were used. Non-parametric tests are also used to analyse ordinal and categorical data, such as the likert scale questions which were asked in the questionnaire for this research. Non-parametric tests may fail to detect a significant difference when compared with a parametric test (Nahm, 2016).

The two non-parametric tests used for data analysis in this research were Pearsons Chi Squared and Mann Whitney U test.

To test the data for relationships between nominal/categorical variables, such as gender and yes/no questions, Pearsons Chi Squared analysis was performed. The Pearsons Chi-squared test, compares the frequencies of variables to see whether the observed data differed significantly from that of the expected data. It is

calculated by the sum of the squared difference between observed (O) and the expected (E) data (or the deviation, d) divided by the expected data by the following formula:

$$\chi^2 = \sum \frac{(O - E)^2}{O}$$

Data being analysed using the Pearson Chi Squared test had to meet the following assumptions:

1. The data in the cells must be in frequencies
2. The levels (or categories) or the variables are mutually exclusive
3. Each subject may contribute data to one and only one cell
4. The value of the cell expected should be 5 or more in at least 80% of the cells and no cell should have an expected of less than one-sample size.

The non-parametric test used for analysis of ordinal variables, such as likert scale questions, was a Mann-Whitney U test. The Mann-Whitney U test compares two sample means that come from the same population, and tests whether the two sample means are equal or not. The formula for the Mann-Whitney U test is:

$$U = n_1 n_2 + \frac{n_2 (n_2 + 1)}{2} - \sum_{i=r_1+1}^{n_2} R_i$$

Where:

U = Mann-Whitney U test

N_1 = sample size one

N_2 = Sample size two

R_i = Rank of the sample size

Mann-Whitney U test does not make any assumptions related to the distribution of scores but it does assume that :

1. The sample drawn from the population is random.
2. Independence within the samples and mutual independence is assumed.
3. Ordinal measurement scale is assumed.

The parametric test used for data analysis in this research was the independent samples T test.

The independent samples t-test was used to measure for significant differences between independent samples which included scale variables, such as age/years of experience. The independent samples t-test measures the difference between the means of the two groups (X^1-X^2) and divides by the standard error of the difference (SE). The formula for t -test is:

$$t = \frac{X_1 - X_2}{SE_{x_1 - x_2}}$$

Data being analyzed using the independent paired t-test had to meet the following assumptions:

1. The dependent variable must be a continuous variable
2. The independent variable must be nominal with 2 categories/groups
3. There must be independence of observations, no relationship between the groups
4. There should be no significant outliers.
5. The dependent variable should be normally distributed
6. There should be homogeneity of variances-tested using Levene's test for homogeneity

3.4.3.2 Qualitative Data Analysis – Thematic analysis

Qualitative data analysis has been described as the “central step” in qualitative research, and in many ways forms the outcomes of the research (Flick, 2013). Defined as “the classification and interpretation of linguistic (or visual) material to make statements about implicit and explicit dimensions and structures of meaning-making in the material” (Flick, 2013 p.4), qualitative data analysis aims to describe, compare and explain selected phenomenon’s and potentially develop theories based on these acquired analysis.

As stated previously the data analysis method used for the qualitative data was thematic analysis. Thematic analysis refers to the process of identifying themes in the data which capture meaning that are relevant to the research question and identify patterns in the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Through its theoretical freedom, it has been stated that thematic analysis provides a flexible research tool, which can provide a rich account of data (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Themes or patterns within data can be identified in one of two primary ways: in an inductive or “bottom up” way, or in a theoretical or deductive or “top down” way. Inductive analysis is a method of coding the data without trying to fit it into a pre-existing coding or research question driven framework. In this sense, this form of thematic analysis is data driven. In contrast, a “theoretical” thematic analysis would generally be guided by the researcher’s theoretical interest in the area, and is therefore more explicitly theory-driven. This form of thematic analysis tends to provide a less rich description of the data in general, and a more detailed analysis of one or more aspects of the data. The choice between inductive and theoretical approaches also influences whether the researcher codes for a quite specific research question (theoretical approach) or the specific research question evolves through the coding process (inductive approach) (Braun and Clarke, 2006). For the purposes of this research a theoretical approach was used to develop themes from the data, using the research questions, existing literature and the quantitative data results as the analytical guide.

The six phases of conducting thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) were followed as the procedure for analyzing the data in this research, see table 3.5 below for an outline of these phases.

Table 3.5 Phases of Thematic Analysis

Table 1: Phases of Thematic Analysis	
Phase	Description of the process
1. Familiarising yourself with your data:	Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.
2. Generating initial codes:	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.
3. Searching for themes:	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
4. Reviewing themes:	Checking in the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis.
5. Defining and naming themes:	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells; generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
6. Producing the report:	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter provided a detailed description of the research methodology employed for this study. It began by outlining the research aims and research questions and went on to discuss the key issues in relation to paradigm choice. A discussion of quantitative and qualitative research methods was presented followed by an indication that a mixed methods approach was the selected methodology for this study. The research was conducted in two phases and the details of each phase were clearly outlined with the research methods of questionnaires, interviews and focus groups used in conducting this research being clearly outlined. Finally the researcher outlined the methods used for analyses of the data including descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. The next chapter will present the research findings.

Chapter 4

Results

4.1 Introduction

This chapter portrays the key findings from the data obtained and analysed in this research study. A combination of mixed-methods qualitative and quantitative data was obtained that allowed the research aim to be addressed through the following research questions:

1. What is the profile of PE Teachers and SNAs teaching in mainstream post primary schools and what is the inclusion profile of these schools?
2. What are the key factors which promote and hinder the inclusion of students with SEN in PE?
3. What are the current roles and responsibilities of the SNA in mainstream post primary schools and what factors influence these roles, from the perspective of the SNA and PE Teacher?
4. What is the current and desired role of the SNA in promoting the inclusion of students with SEN in post primary PE, from the perspective of the SNA and PE Teacher?
5. Is there a demand for the provision of training amongst SNA's on including children with SEN in PE?

The data included questionnaires from PE teachers, questionnaires from SNAs and interviews and focus groups with SNAs. In line with the mixed methods explanatory sequential design implemented in this research study, quantitative data will be presented first, followed by the qualitative data. The quantitative data being presented includes descriptive and inferential statistics from the SNA and PE teacher questionnaires and the qualitative data includes SNA focus groups and interviews and comments from the questionnaires.

4.2 Quantitative Data

The quantitative data was screened and cleaned and entered into IBM SPSS statistics package 22. The results of the data analysis are presented below.

The sample size of SNA questionnaire participants was $n=330$. The percentage of missing values for the questions asked on the SNA questionnaire range from 0.61% to 36.72%, with the average number of missing cases being 7.22%.

The sample size of PE teacher questionnaire participants was $n=193$. The percentage of missing values for the questions asked on the PE teacher questionnaire ranged from 1.62% to 35.82%, with the average number of missing cases being 9.43%.¹

For the purposes of the analysis, missing values are stated prior to the presentation of the results from the Likert Scale questions, in order to provide accurate responses for each variable. For all other questions missing values will only be stated if they are higher than 20%, in order to allow transparent interpretation of the data.

All percentages and mean scores presented are based on valid responses for each question and missing data were excluded.

The criterion p value accepted as determining statistical significance in this study was set at $p<0.05$ and the exact p value is reported with the results of each test presented in this chapter.

All of the analysis presented in this chapter met the assumptions for the particular statistical test conducted. These assumptions were outlined in the methodology chapter.

¹ Two additional questions were asked to just half of the PE teacher participants in a second postage round of the questionnaire, therefore the sample sizes and missing values for these questions will be reported with the data from these questions in section 4.2.3.

The descriptive and inferential statistics, derived from the questionnaires completed by SNAs and PE Teachers, will be presented under the following topics and sub topics: PE Teacher and SNA profile, Inclusion profile and inclusion practices of post-primary schools, Inclusion in PE, SNA in mainstream education (roles and responsibilities and factors influencing role) and SNA in PE (roles and responsibilities and factors influencing role).

4.2.1 PE Teacher and SNA Profile

This section provides the background information on the PE teachers and SNAs who participated in this research and are considered to be a representative sample of PE teachers and SNAs working in mainstream post primary schools throughout Ireland. The data presented will include gender breakdown, age, years of experience and school location.

4.2.1.1 Gender, Age and Experience

The PE teachers who participated in the questionnaire comprised of 44% Males and 56% Females. The mean age of PE teachers was 36.76 ($SD^2=8.79$) years with an average of 10.45 ($SD=7.94$) years teaching experience. Ninety eight percent of the PE teachers had experience teaching students with SEN and the majority of PE teachers who participated in this research had a level 8 qualification (75%), with 24% having a level 9 qualification and just 1% having a level 5 qualification with no specific PE training.

² SD =Standard Deviation

The SNAs who participated in the questionnaire comprised of 7% Males and 93% Females. The mean age of SNAs was 46.37 ($SD=10.07$) years with an average of 7.89 ($SD=4.51$) years of experience working as an SNA.

An Independent T test identified that PE teachers in this study were significantly younger ($p=.000$) than SNAs but had significantly more years of working experience ($p=.000$). The results of the Independent T test can be seen in Table 4.1 below.

Table 4.1. Summary of results from statistical analysis of age and years' experience of SNAs and PE teachers.

	SNAs	PE	Pearson Chi-Squared Result
Age	46.37 ($SD=10.07$)	36.76 ($SD=8.79$)	$t(403.707)= 11.950, p=.000$
Years' experience	7.89 ($SD=4.51$)	10.45 ($SD=7.94$)	$t(119.374)= -4.051, p=.000$

4.2.1.2 Geographical spread of schools

The geographical location of schools where PE Teachers were employed was distributed across 23 counties with the majority of P.E. teacher participants being located in Dublin (25%). The geographical location of schools where SNAs were employed was distributed across 26 counties with the majority of them also being

located in Dublin (31%). Figure 1 below illustrates the breakdown of the top 9 counties where respondents of the questionnaire were employed.

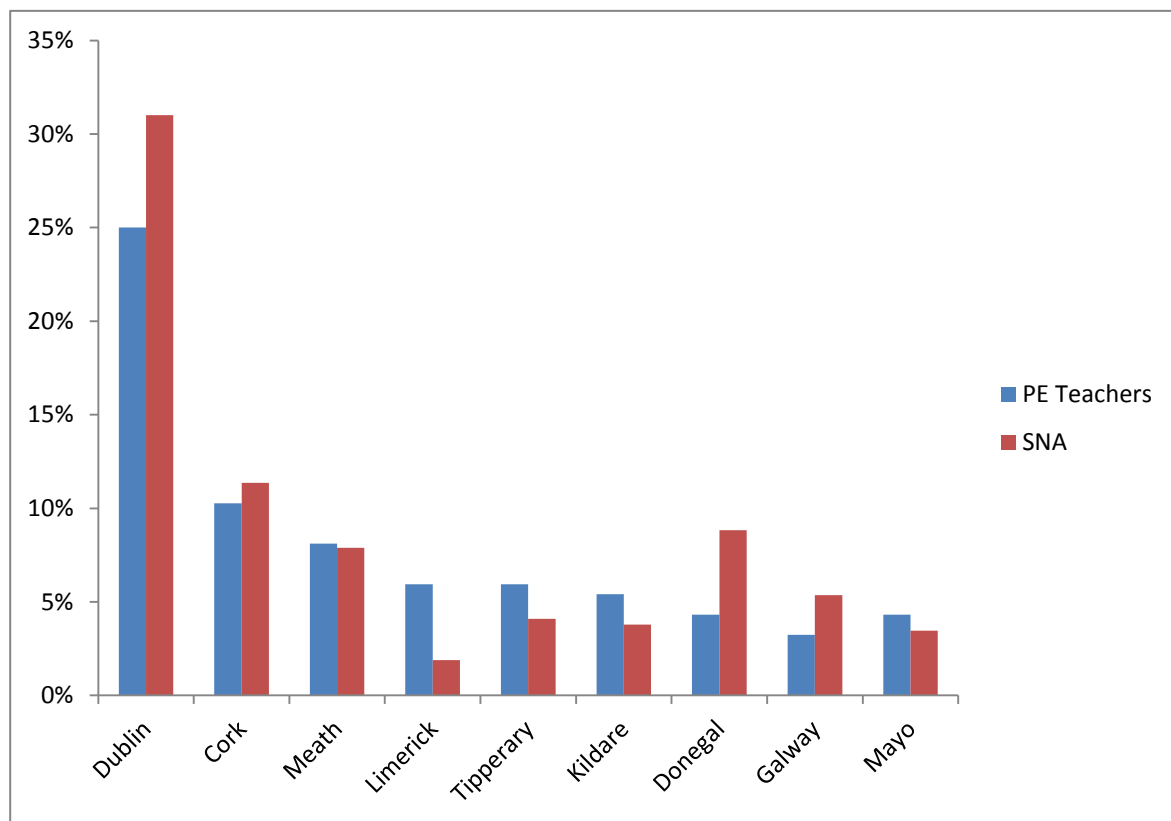


Figure 4.1. Geographical profile of schools where PE teachers and SNAs were employed.

Figure 4.1 shows that the majority of both PE teachers and SNAs worked in Dublin (PE Teachers 25%, SNAs 31%) followed by Cork (PE Teachers 10%, SNAs 11%) and Meath (PE Teachers 8%, SNAs 8%).

4.2.2 Inclusion Profile and Inclusion Practices of Post Primary Schools

This section outlines the data obtained in relation to the inclusion profile of the post primary schools in which the respondents to the questionnaire were employed.

This includes, school status, number of students and those with SEN, categories of student's SEN, number of SNA's and ratios in this regard and finally, details of IEP's.

4.2.2.1 Schools Level of Disadvantage

The descriptive statistics showed that a higher percentage of PE teachers (71%) worked in Non-Deis schools in comparison to Deis (29%) schools. A higher percentage of SNAs (59%) also worked in Non-Deis schools in comparison to Deis (41%). Pearson Chi squared analysis indicated that there was a statistically significant association between SNAs and PE teachers in relation to whether they worked in DEIS or Non DEIS schools, $X^2 (1, N = 503) = 6.881, p = .009$.

4.2.2.2 Number of Students with and without SEN in Schools

Table 4.2. Mean numbers of students in schools of PE Teachers and SNAs

	Number of students			Number of Students with SEN		
	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
PE Teachers Schools	189	575.56	274.35	124	55.18	45.54
SNAs Schools	307	563.23	269.65	209	51.20	44.45

PE teachers reported that an average of 576.23 students attended the schools where they were employed with an average of 55.18 of these students having a SEN. Missing values were high for this question at 35.82%.

Similarly, SNAs reported that an average of 563.23 students attended the schools where they were employed with an average of 51.20 of these students having an SEN. Missing values were high for this question at 36.72%.

4.2.2.3 Categories of Special Educational Needs in Mainstream schools

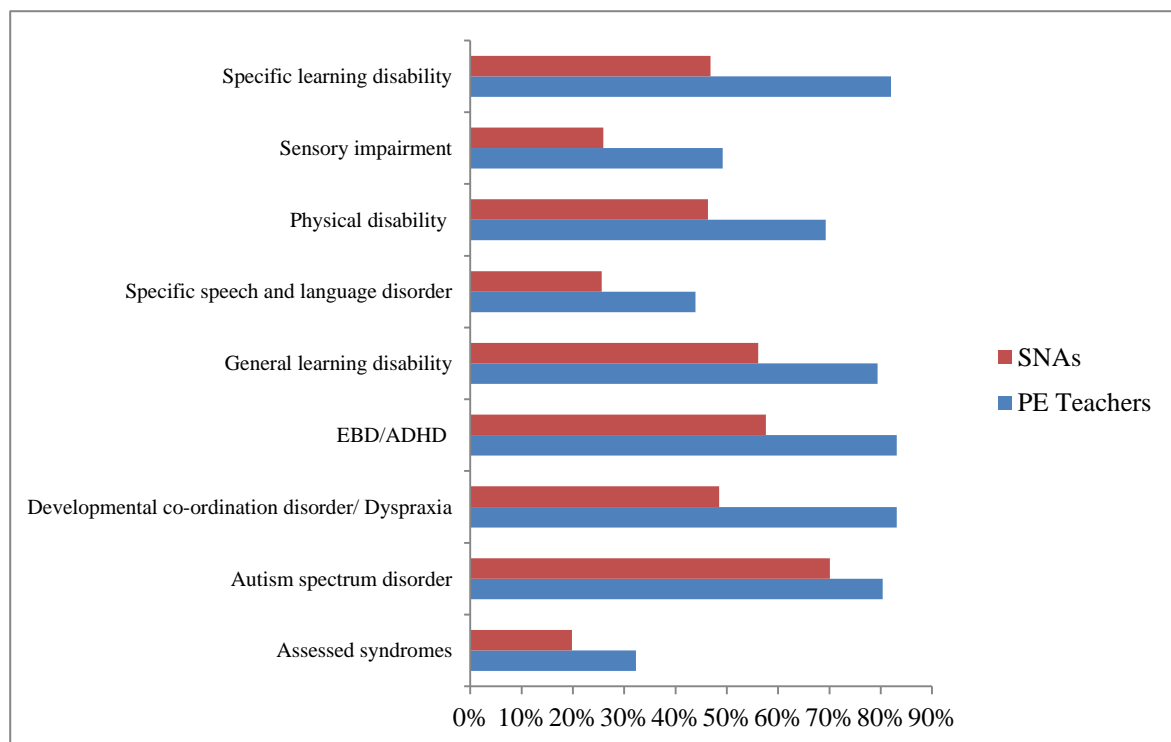


Figure 4.2. Bar Chart showing breakdown of SEN groups in schools of Teachers and SNAs.

As can be seen in figure 4.2 above, the most prevalent groups of students with SEN, that PE Teachers reported working with, were students with Dyspraxia (83%), Emotional and Behavioural Disturbances/Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) (83%), Specific Learning Disabilities (82%) and Autism (80%). In contrast the most prevalent groups of students with SEN that the sample of n=324 SNAs reported working with were students with Autism (70%) followed by Emotional/Behavioural Disturbances (58%), General Learning Disabilities (56%) and Dyspraxia (49%).

Interestingly the group of SEN students which PE Teachers reported having the least experience of working with were students with Assessed Syndromes (32%), Specific Speech and Language Disorders (44%) and Sensory Impairment (49%). This was also reflected in the SNA group who reported that they had the least experience working with students with Assessed Syndromes (20%), Specific Speech and Language disorders (26%) and Sensory Impairment (26%).

The results of a Pearson Chi Squared test showed that there was a significant association between SNAs and PE teachers' selection of the type of SEN of students they worked with. The results indicated that PE teachers selected working with higher numbers of students with all of the SEN types than SNAs. See table 4.3 for an illustration of the full results of the Chi square analysis

Table 4.3. Summary of results from Pearson chi-square test illustrating associations between SNAs and PE teachers responses to type of SEN of students with whom they work.

Type of SEN	% of SNAs who worked with students with type of SEN	% of PE teachers worked with students with type of SEN	Pearson Chi-Squared Result
Assessed Syndrome	20%	32%	$\chi^2 (1, N = 517) = 10.097, p = .001$
Autism	70%	80%	$\chi^2 (1, N = 517) = 6.595, p = .010$
Dyspraxia	49%	83%	$\chi^2 (1, N = 517) = 60.384, p = .000$
EBD¹	58%	83%	$\chi^2 (1, N = 517) = 35.077, p = .000$
GLD²	56%	79%	$\chi^2 (1, N = 517) = 28.388, p = .000$
SSLD³	26%	44%	$\chi^2 (1, N = 517) = 18.374, p = .000$
Physical	46%	69%	$\chi^2 (1, N = 517) = 25.537, p = .000$
Sensory	26%	49%	$\chi^2 (1, N = 517) = 28.814, p = .000$
SLD⁴	47%	82%	$\chi^2 (1, N = 517) = 61.293, p = .000$
¹ Emotional and Behavioural Disorders ² General Learning Disabilities ³ Specific Speech and Language Disorders ⁴ Specific Learning Disabilities			

4.2.2.4 Number of SNAs employed in Schools

PE teachers reported an average of 4.34 ($SD=3.31$) SNAs working in their schools, which suggests an average ratio of 14:1, students with SEN to SNAs, in the schools where PE teachers from this research were employed. SNAs reported an average of 4.82 ($SD=3.32$) SNAs working in their schools, which gives a suggested average of 10:1, students with SEN to SNAs. SNA participants indicated that the average number of students with SEN that they worked with was 4.97 ($SD=4.24$).

To determine if there was a difference between the numbers of SNAs employed in schools which were DEIS or non DEIS, an independent t-test was conducted. The results of the test illustrated that in both the SNA ($t(209.849)=3.502$, $p=.001$) and PE teachers ($t(63.943)=2.596$, $p=.012$) questionnaire samples, there were statistically more SNAs employed in DEIS schools than non DEIS schools. Analysis of the results showed that DEIS schools, in the SNA participants questionnaire, employed an average of 5.73 SNAs ($SD=3.897$) and non DEIS schools employed an average of 4.32 SNAs ($SD=2.797$), while DEIS schools in the PE teacher participants questionnaire employed an average of 5.57 SNAs ($SD=4.110$) in comparison to an average of 3.88 SNAs ($SD=2.862$) in non DEIS schools.

4.2.2.5 Individual Education Planning

The questionnaire explored the input from SNA's into developing and implementing IEP's for their students. SNAs who responded to this question indicated that 46% had an input for the students with whom they worked. In relation to IEPs for PE just 20% of SNAs indicated that they assisted with the development and implementation of these for the students with whom they worked.

4.2.3 Inclusion in PE

This section will provide an overview of the data which highlights current PE practices, and the attitudes of PE Teachers and SNAs towards including students with SEN in P.E. In addition the current inclusion practices, factors which could promote inclusion and overall training needs required for inclusion in PE will be presented.

4.2.3.1 Current PE Practices

In an effort to explore the current PE practices in schools, ³a sample of n=108 PE teachers were asked “Do you feel you cover all seven of the PE curriculum strands equally in your PE classes? The missing value for this question was 1.8%. From this sample 78% (n=83) answered “No” revealing that they do not feel all strands are covered equally in PE.

A further question was asked to n=108 PE teachers to examine which of the 7 strands of the PE curriculum were “Most Frequently” delivered, using a 5 point Likert Scale from “Most Frequently” to “Not at all Frequently”. Missing values for this question ranged from 23% to 27%. Percentages are presented based on valid responses and missing values are excluded. See table 4.4 for a breakdown of these responses.

³ Two additional questions were asked to just half of the PE teacher participants in a second postage round of the questionnaire, therefore the sample sizes and missing values for these questions is reported with the data from these questions

Table 4.4. Most Frequently delivered strands of PE, from the perspective of PE Teachers

Adventure Activities	Athletics	Aquatics	Dance	Games	Gymnastics	Health Related Activity
6%	11%	2%	9%	71%	13%	41%

An overwhelming majority of 71% (n=51) respondents selected the “Games” strand as being the most frequently delivered strand in their PE classes, which was followed by 41% (n= 33) of participants choosing “Health related activity”.

4.2.3.2 Attitudes towards inclusion in PE

PE Teachers and SNAs were asked “Do you feel that PE is as important as other academic subjects for students with SEN?” Encouragingly, 98% of PE Teachers and 98% of SNAs responded “Yes”.

PE Teachers and SNAs were asked to rate the “Most Beneficial” outcomes of PE for students with SEN using a 5 point Likert Scale where 1=Most Beneficial and 5=Not Beneficial. Missing values for this question ranged from 6.2% to 9.4%.

The descriptive statistics indicated that 74% of PE teachers and 80% of SNAs perceived that “Increasing time socialising and playing games with peers” was the Most Beneficial outcome of PE for students with SEN. See Figure 4.3 below for a further breakdown of the most beneficial outcomes of PE for students with SEN from the PE Teacher and SNA perspectives.

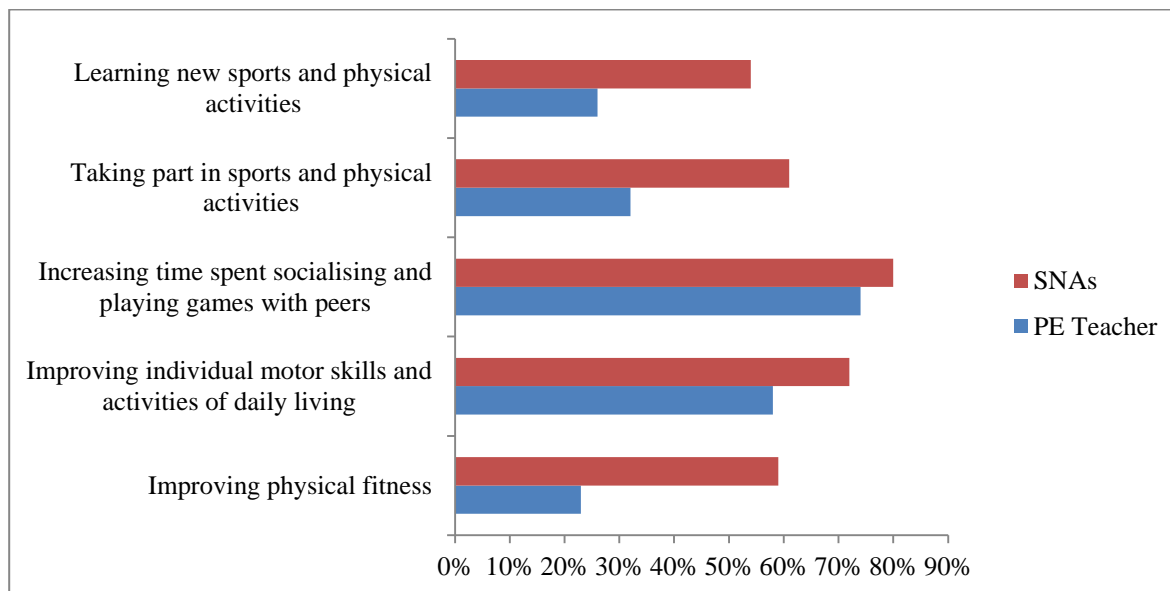


Figure 4.3 Perceived “Most Beneficial” outcomes of PE for students with SEN.

In order to see if any difference lay between SNA and PE teachers’ response to the selection of “Most Beneficial” outcomes of PE, a Mann-Whitney U test was employed. The results indicate that SNAs were statistically more likely to perceive the following outcomes of PE as more beneficial than PE teachers; “Improving physical fitness” ($p=.000$), “Improving motor skills and activities of daily living” ($p=.004$), “Taking part in sports and physical activities” ($p=.000$) and “Learning new sports and physical activities” ($p=.000$). See table 4.5 for an overview of the results.

Table 4.5. Statistically significant differences between perceived beneficial outcomes of PE by PE teachers and SNAs.

Role of SNA	Mann-Whitney U Test result
<i>Improving physical fitness</i>	U=38461, p=.000
<i>Improving motor skills and activities of daily living</i>	U=31642.5, p=.004
<i>Taking part in sports and physical activities</i>	U=35377, p=.000
<i>Learning new sports and physical activities</i>	U=34985, p=.000

4.2.3.3 Current Inclusion Practices in PE

PE Teachers and SNAs were asked “Do you feel that students with SEN are fully included in PE class?” Just over half of PE Teachers (56%) and SNAs (59%) answered “Yes” with an additional 40% of PE Teachers and 28% of SNAs answering “Sometimes” to this question.

In order to see if there was an association between the responses to the question above and whether the participant was an SNA or a PE teacher, a Pearson Chi Square test was employed with the results of the test indicating that a significant association did exist, $\chi^2 (3, N = 484) = 14.401, p = .002$.

See figure 4.4 for the full breakdown of responses to this question by SNAs and PE teachers.

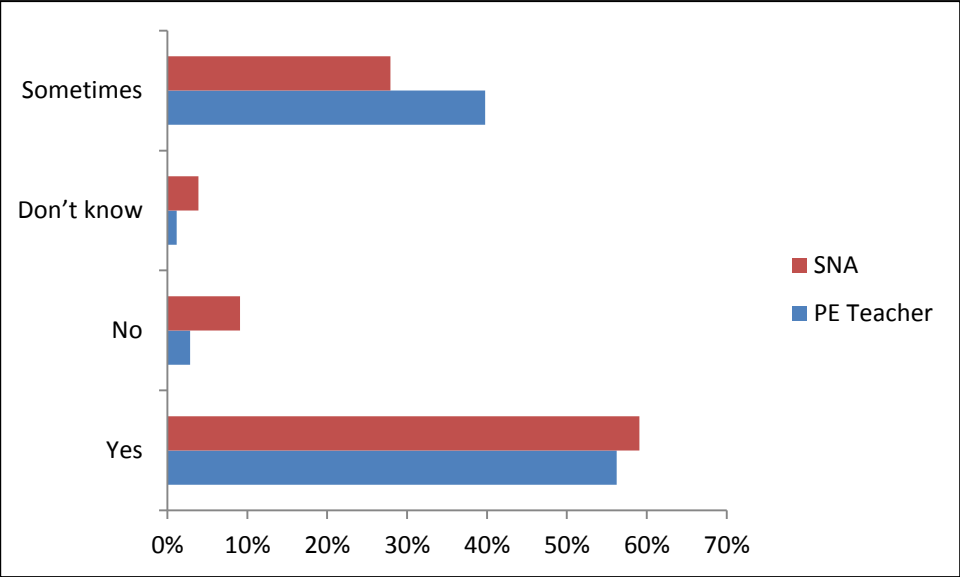


Figure 4.4 PE Teachers and SNAs perceptions of whether students with SEN are fully included in PE Class

However, when PE Teacher and SNAs were asked “Do you feel students with SEN enjoy PE class” the majority of PE Teachers (97%) and SNAs (93%) selected “Yes”, as can be seen in figure 4.5 below.

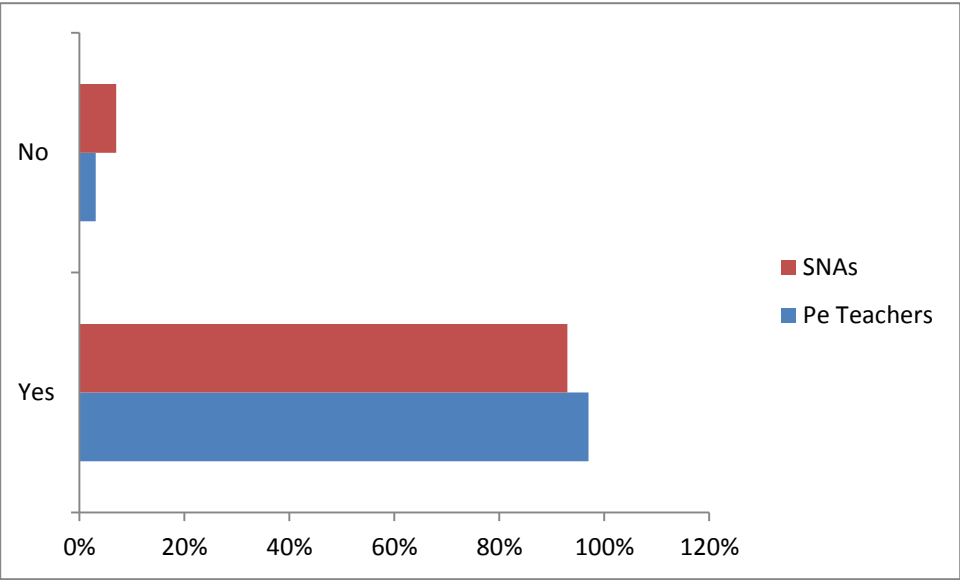


Figure 4.5. PE Teachers and SNAs perceptions of whether students with SEN enjoy PE class.

4.2.3.4 Factors which enable inclusion in PE

PE teachers selected factors

PE Teachers were asked what factors they believed were most important in ensuring the inclusion of students with SEN in PE using a 5 point Likert scale, missing values for this question ranged from 6% to 9%. Fifty-nine percent of PE Teachers stated that they believed *“information regarding the needs of the student with SEN”* was most important followed by 47% selecting *“training on how to include students with SEN”*.

SNA and PE teacher Age, Gender and years of experience

In order to test whether any significant relationship existed between SNAs or PE teachers gender and their perceived levels of the inclusion or enjoyment of students with SEN in PE, a Pearson chi-square test was employed. The results of the test indicated that there was no statistically significant relationship between these variables.

To determine if there was any significant difference between age or years of experience of SNAs and PE teachers and their perceived levels of the inclusion or enjoyment of students with SEN in PE, an independent t-test was employed. The results of the test found that there was no statistically significant difference between these variables.

See table 4.6 for the significance levels of the Pearson Chi Squared tests and table 4.7 for the significance levels of the Independent t tests which were conducted.

Table 4.6 Significance levels of Pearson Chi Squared test on the relationship between gender of SNAs and PE teachers and their students with SEN levels of enjoyment and inclusion in PE.

	SNA	PE Teacher
Gender * Enjoy	P=.209	P=.623
Gender * Included	P=.648	P=.051

Table 4.7 Significance levels of Independent T-test analysing the differences between PE teachers and SNAs age and years of experience and their students with SEN levels of enjoyment and inclusion in PE.

	SNA	PE Teacher
Age * Enjoy	p=.861	P=.962
Years of Experience * Enjoy	P=.543	P=.509
Age * Included	P=.717	P=.559
Years of Experience * Included	P=.120	P=.204

SEN Type

The relationship between the types of SEN of students that SNAs worked with and the reported levels of inclusion in PE, and enjoyment of PE, were explored using a Pearson chi-squared test. The results indicated that there was a statistically significant relationship between SNAs who worked with students with sensory disabilities and the perceived levels of enjoyment of students in PE, ($X^2 (1, N = 298) = 5.116, p = .024$). Further analysis of the data indicated that 99% of SNAs who worked with students with sensory disabilities perceived that the students they worked with enjoyed PE in comparison to 97% of the entire SNA sample.

Furthermore, a chi square test identified that there was a statistically significant relationship between SNAs working with students with sensory disabilities and their perceptions of the levels of inclusion of students with SEN in PE ($X^2 (3, N = 307) = 8.095, p = .044$). Analysis of the results illustrated that 67.5% of SNAs working with students with sensory disabilities selected “yes” to students being fully included in PE in comparison to 59% of the general SNA sample.

The remaining results indicated that there was no significant relationship between SEN type and the reported levels of inclusion in or enjoyment of PE for students with SEN.

Perceptions of Benefits of PE

In order to explore whether there was a difference between SNAs perceptions of the beneficial outcomes of PE, and their perceptions of students with SEN's inclusion in and enjoyment of PE, a Mann Whitney-U test was conducted. The results of the test revealed that SNAs who perceived “*time spent socialising and playing games*” was an important benefit of PE, were statistically more likely to have also selected that the students with SEN that they worked with enjoyed PE ($U = 3430, p = .046$).

Furthermore, the test revealed that SNAs who selected “*improvements in fitness levels*” ($U = 3045, p = .043$) and “*Learning new sports and physical activities*”

($U=2761$, $p=.034$) as important benefits of PE, were statistically more likely to believe that the students with SEN they worked with were included in PE.

4.2.3.5 Training needs for inclusion in PE

The notion of training on the topic of inclusion of students with SEN in PE, was explored with PE teachers and SNAs. Respondents were asked “Have you previously received any training on how to include students with SEN in PE?”

The results showed that 65% of the PE Teachers and just 7% of SNAs have received such training.

Of the PE Teachers who received training, 92% felt the training was of benefit to them. The type of training which was frequently mentioned included Adapted Physical Education/Activity modules as part of their university degree and workshops run by Physical Education Association of Ireland (PEAI), CARA APA Centre and Autism Ireland, whilst training received by the SNAs was reported to come from sources including the Irish Wheelchair Association, the CARA Adapted Physical Activity Centre, Local Sports Partnerships and the Football Association of Ireland.

PE Teachers and SNAs were asked “Would you be willing to take a course on including children with SEN in PE if it was provided for you in your school?”

Ninety eight percent of PE Teachers and 96% of SNAs stated that they would be willing to take a training course on inclusion in PE and both PE Teachers (82%) and SNAs (71%) had a preference for doing this training as a 1 day in-school training workshop.

Additionally, 94% of SNAs stated that such training would enable them to become more active in assisting students with SEN in PE.

4.2.4 SNA in Mainstream Education

This section will present descriptive statistics gathered on the roles and responsibilities of SNAs in mainstream post primary schools from the PE teachers and SNAs questionnaires.

4.2.4.1 SNA Roles and Responsibilities

PE teachers and SNA were asked to rate which SNA duties they felt were most important on a 5 point Likert scale with 1 being Most Important and 5 being Not Important. The range of duties offered for selection were based on those stated in the SNA Circular 0030/2014 (DES, 2014) and in literature (Carrig, 2004; Kerins and Mc Donagh 2005; Logan, 2006; O'Neill and Rose, 2008; DES, 2011). Missing values for this question ranged from 5%-14%.

The responses from both PE Teachers and SNAs can be seen in Figure 4.6 and 4.7.

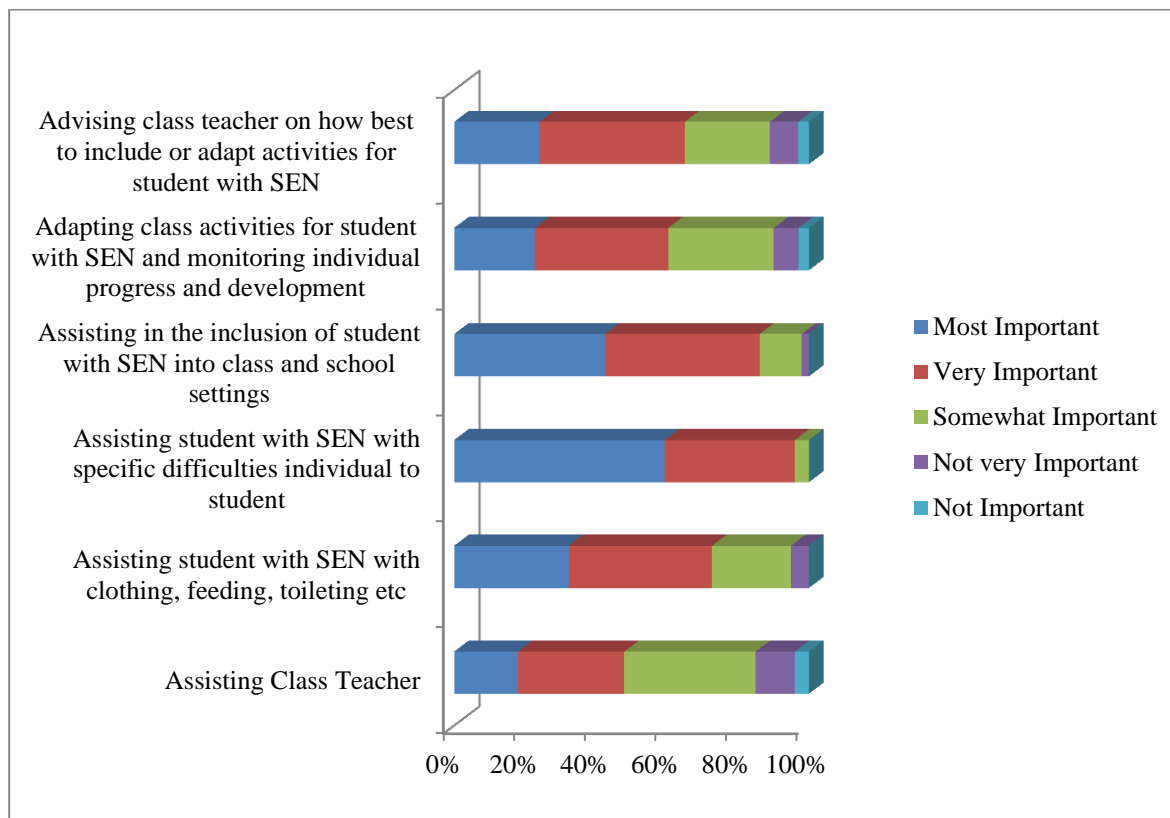


Figure 4.6. Most Important duties of SNAs-Perceptions of PE Teachers

As can be seen in the figure above, the duty which was perceived to be most important by PE Teachers was “Assisting student with SEN with specific difficulties individual to student” (60%), followed by “Assisting in the inclusion of student with SEN into class and school settings” (43%) and “Assisting students with SEN with clothing, feeding, toileting etc” (32%).

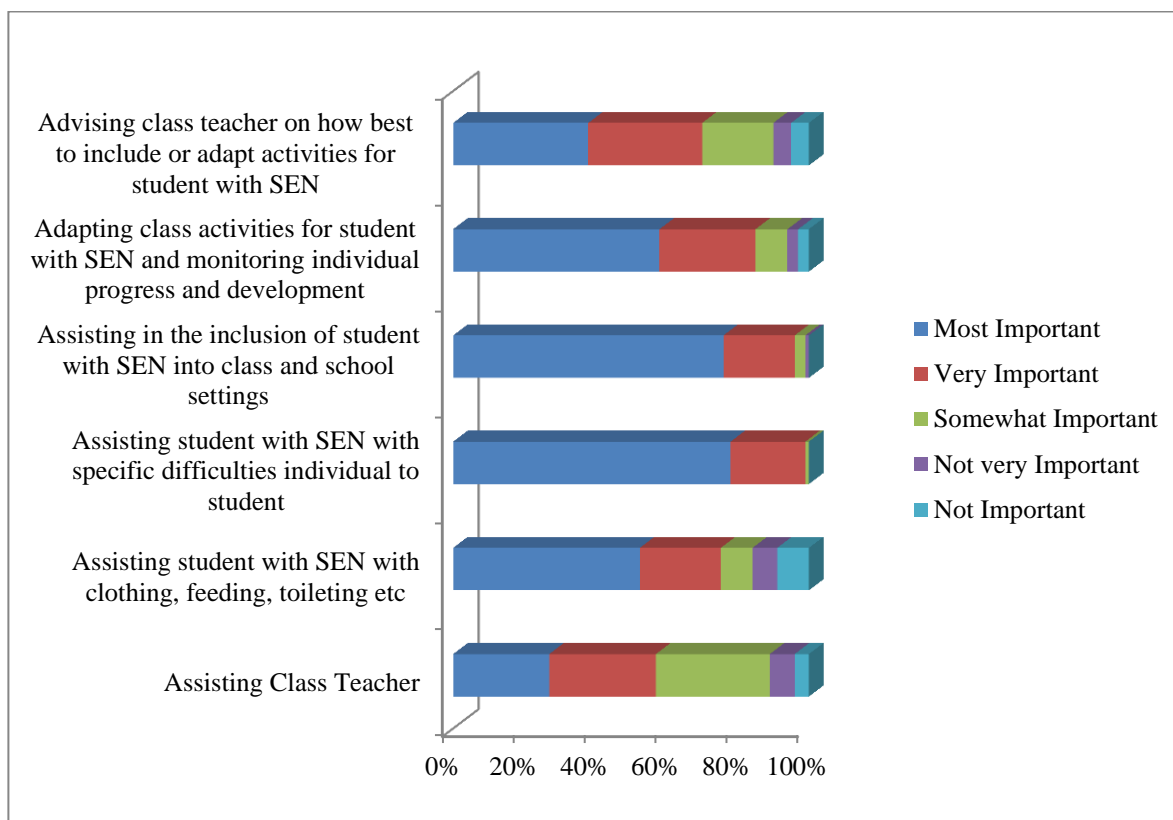


Figure 4.7. Most Important duties of SNAs-Perceptions of SNAs

Similarly to PE Teachers, the most important duty chosen by SNAs was “Assisting student with SEN with specific difficulties individual to student” (78%), closely followed by “Assisting in the inclusion of students with SEN into class and school settings” (76%). Unlike PE teachers however, the next most important duty which SNAs selected was “Adapting class activities for student with SEN and monitoring individual progress and development” (58%).

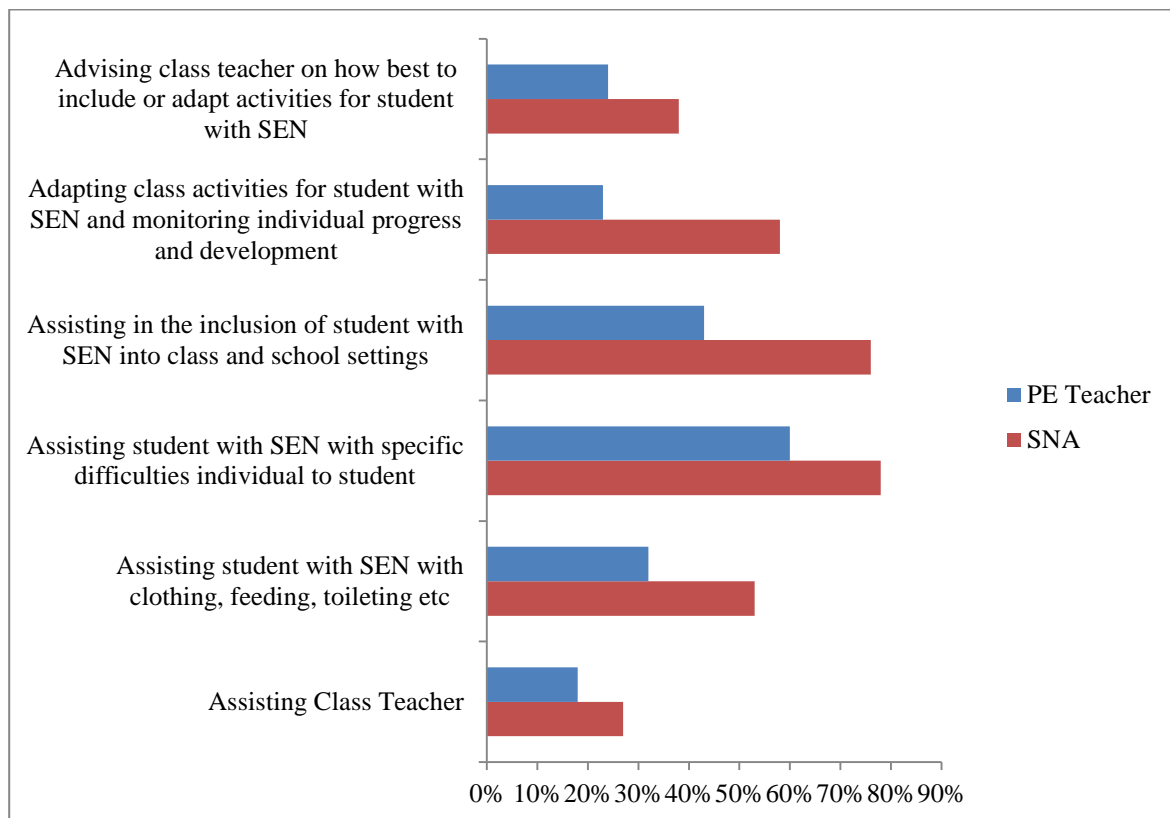


Figure 4.8. Comparison of “Most Important” duties of the SNA as chosen by SNAs and PE Teachers

Comparisons between the SNA and PE Teacher selections of most important duties highlights some interesting results including “*Adapting class activities for student with SEN and monitoring individual progress and development*” which was chosen by 58% of SNAs as being the most important was only chosen by 23% of PE Teachers and also “*Assisting in the inclusion of student with SEN into class and school setting*” chosen by 76% of SNAs and just 43% of PE teachers.

To investigate whether there were statistically significant differences between SNAs and PE teachers’ perceptions of the importance of the duties of SNAs, a Mann-Whitney U test was employed. The results of the test highlighted that SNAs were statistically more likely to perceive all of the duties of the SNA as being more important than PE teachers, with significance levels ranging from $p < .001$ to $p < .05$. The specific results of the Mann-Whitney U test, showing the statistical difference

between SNAs and PE teachers choices of each of the duties, are presented in Table 4.8 below.

Table. 4.8 Differences between SNAs and PE teachers perceived importance of duties of SNAs.

Duties of SNA	Mann-Whitney U Test result
<i>Assisting Class Teacher</i>	U=26987, p=.020
<i>Assisting student with SEN with care needs</i>	U=26833, p=.009
<i>Assisting student with SEN with specific difficulties</i>	U=31175, p=.000
<i>Assisting in the inclusion of student with SEN into class</i>	U=35347, p=.000
<i>Adapting class activities for student with SEN</i>	U=35725, p=.000
<i>Advising class teacher on how best to include or adapt</i>	U=28164, p=.018

4.2.4.2 SEN Type and Duties of SNA

To investigate if there was a difference between the type of SEN of students that SNAs worked with and the duties they selected fulfilling, a Mann-Whitney U test was conducted. The result of the test indicated that there were many statistically significant differences between the type of SEN of students that SNAs were working with and duties they reported as being most important. For example, SNAs working with students with autism, were significantly more likely to perceive the duties of “Assisting with care needs” and “Assisting the class teacher” as being one of the most important duties they engaged in as opposed to SNAs who did not work with students with this disability. Those working with sensory disabilities were significantly more likely to select “*Assisting Care Needs*” and “*Assisting with difficulties specific to student’s needs*”, while SNAs working with specific learning disabilities were significantly more likely to select “*Assisting in the inclusion of student with SEN into class*” and “*Adapting class activities for student with SEN*” as the most important duties. See table 4.9 Below for a full overview of the results.

Table 4.9 Significant Results of Mann Whitney U test measuring the relationship between the type of SEN of the students that SNAs worked with and the roles they fulfilled.

Roles fulfilled by SNA	SEN Type of Student SNA worked with	Mann Whitney U result
<i>Assisting Class Teacher</i>	<i>Autism</i>	<i>U=10408, p=.047</i>
<i>Assisting Care Needs</i>	<i>Autism</i>	<i>U=9728, p=.018</i>
	<i>Assessed Syndromes</i>	<i>U=7790, p=.033</i>
	<i>GLD</i>	<i>U=11748, p=.004</i>
	<i>SSLD</i>	<i>U=9161, p=.021</i>
	<i>Physical</i>	<i>U=11651, p=.007</i>
	<i>Sensory</i>	<i>U=9285, p=.005</i>
<i>Assisting student with SEN with specific difficulties</i>	<i>Sensory</i>	<i>U=10371, p=.047</i>
<i>Assisting in the inclusion of student with SEN into class</i>	<i>SLD</i>	<i>U=13607, p=.013</i>
<i>Adapting class activities for student with SEN</i>	<i>SLD</i>	<i>U=13091, p=.021</i>

4.2.5 Roles and Responsibilities of SNA in PE

This section is concerned with the roles and responsibilities of the SNA in PE from the perspectives of the SNAs and PE teachers. It will present their attitude towards the importance of the SNA in PE, what they report as being the current and desired roles for SNA's in PE and also the factors which could influence their role either positively or negatively.

4.2.5.1 Importance of SNA in PE

PE Teachers and SNAs were asked "Do you feel that SNA's have an important role to play in the inclusion of children with SEN during PE class?" 83% of PE teachers responded stating that they felt SNAs had an important role to play in the inclusion of students with SEN in PE, which is lower than the 92% of SNAs who stated the same.

To explore whether there was a statistically significant relationship between the perceived importance of the SNA in PE depending on whether the respondent was an SNA or PE teacher, a Pearson Chi Squared test was employed. The analysis indicated that SNAs were significantly more likely to perceive the role of the SNA in PE as being important, $\chi^2 (1, N=473)=9.248, p=.002$.

An independent t-test was conducted to test whether there were significant differences between PE teachers' age or years of experience and their perceived importance of the role of the SNA in PE. No statistical significance was found between the age ($p=.081$) of PE teachers and their perceptions of the importance of the role of the SNA in PE, however a statistically significant difference was found between PE teachers years of experience and their perception of the importance of the SNAs role in PE. The results of the independent t-test indicated that PE teachers who had more years of teaching experience were more likely to answer "yes" to the question "*do you feel SNAs have an important role to play in the inclusion of students with SEN during PE class*", $t(38.706)=2.467, p=.018$.

Further analysis was conducted using a Chi Squared test to determine if there was an association between the gender of the PE teachers and their perceived importance of the SNA in PE, however no statistically significant association was found ($p=.256$).

4.2.5.2 Roles and Responsibilities

Current Role of SNA in PE

In exploring the role of SNAs in PE, both SNAs and PE Teachers were asked to choose “Which best describes the current role of the SNA in PE” from a list of options. SNA respondents identified the top three roles as being “*Assisting student in participating in class activities*” (56%), “*Stay and Observe Class*” (48%) and “*Assisting Student in preparing for class*” (40%). While, the top three roles selected by a sample of PE Teachers included “*Assisting student in participating in class activities*” (40%), “*Assisting Student in preparing for class*” (40%) and “*Drop to and Collect student from class*” (38%).

See figure 4. 9 for a further breakdown of the current roles of SNAs in PE.

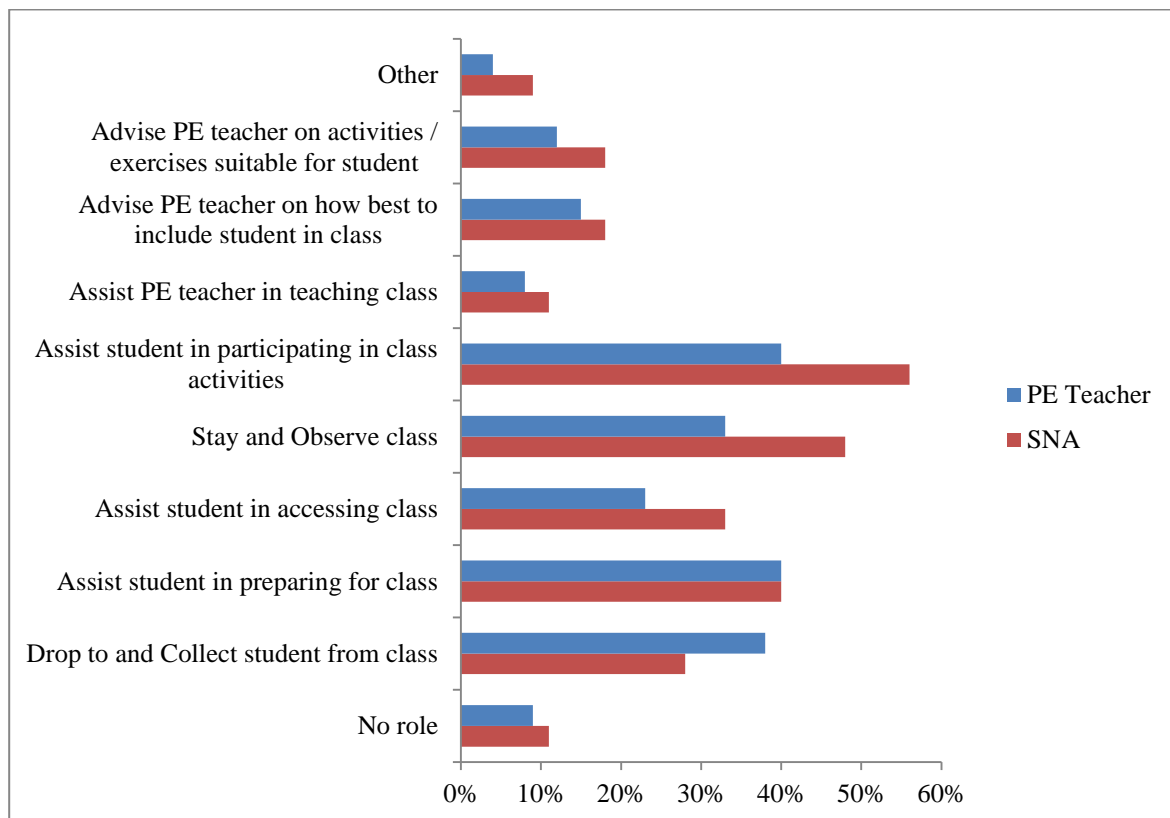


Figure 4.9. Perceptions of PE teachers and SNAs of the current roles of SNAs in PE

To identify if there was a statistically significant association between the selected roles of SNAs and the respondent being an SNA or a PE teachers, a Pearson Chi-Squared test was employed. Analysis of the data showed that PE teachers were statistically more likely to select the current role of SNAs in PE to be “Drop to and Collect” ($p=.020$) than SNAs were. Conversely, the results showed that SNAs were statistically more likely to select the current role of SNAs in PE to include: “Assist student with access to class” ($p=.027$), “Stay and Observe” ($p=.002$) and “Assist student in participation” ($p=.001$). See table 4.10 below for a full illustration of the results.

Table 4.10 Statistically significant difference between SNAs and PE teachers selection of current roles of SNAs in PE

Current Role of SNA in PE	% of SNAs who choose role	% of PE teachers who chose role	Pearson Chi-Squared Result
<i>Drop to and Collect</i>	28%	38%	$X^2 (1, N = 489) = 5.424, p = .020$
<i>Assist student with access to class</i>	33%	23%	$X^2 (1, N = 489) = 4.896, p = .027$
<i>Stay and Observe</i>	48%	33%	$X^2 (1, N = 489) = 9.584, p = .002$
<i>Assist student in participation</i>	56%	40%	$X^2 (1, N = 489) = 10.583, p = .001$

Desired Role of SNA in PE

To investigate the desired role of the SNA in PE, both SNAs and PE Teachers were asked to identify “Which best describes the role they would like the SNA to have in PE class?” from the same list of options as in the previous question. From the sample of SNA participants the most desirable role was chosen as “*Assisting student in participating in class activities*” (68%), followed by “*Stay and Observe*” (39%) and “*Assist Student in accessing class*” (36%). Similarly PE teachers chose “*Assisting student in participating in class activities*” (68%) as the most desirable role, followed by “*Assist the student in preparing for the class*” (41%) and “*Advise the PE teacher on how best to include the student with SEN*” (37%). Comparisons

of all other roles chosen as being desirable by SNAs and PE Teachers can be seen in figure 4.10 below.

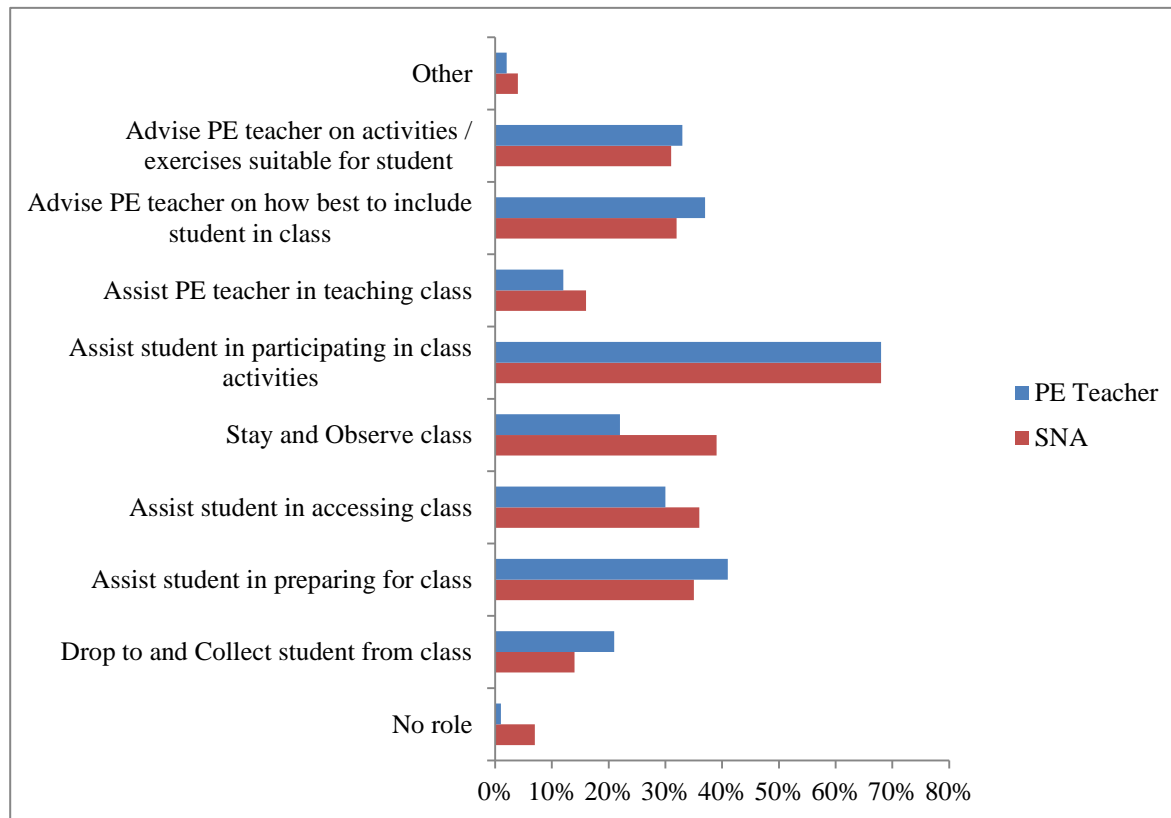


Figure 4.10. Perceptions of the PE Teachers and SNAs of the desired roles of SNAs in PE

A Pearson Chi-squared test was employed to identify if there were any significant associations between SNAs and PE teachers' selections of the desired roles for SNAs in PE. The results showed that a statistically higher number of PE teachers selected the desired role "*Drop to and Collect student from class*" ($p=.040$) than SNAs. Conversely, the analysis of the data indicated that a statistically higher number of SNAs selected the desired role "*Stay and Observe class*" ($p=.000$) than PE teachers.

See table 4.11 for a full illustration of these results.

Table 4.11 Statistically significant differences between SNAs and PE teachers selections of the desired roles of SNAs in PE.

<i>Desired Role of SNA in PE</i>	<i>% of SNAs who choose role</i>	<i>% of PE teachers who chose role</i>	<i>Pearson Chi-Squared Result</i>
<i>Drop to and Collect student from class</i>	14% (N=40)	21% (N=36)	$\chi^2 (1, N = 468) = 4.214, p = .040$
<i>Stay and Observe class</i>	39% (N=114)	22% (N=39)	$\chi^2 (1, N = 468) = 12.847, p = .000$

Desired Role V Current Role

Notable differences can be seen in the desired roles, of SNAs in PE, compared with the current roles, as chosen by the PE Teachers and SNAs. Figure 4.11 below provides an illustration of the responses from both PE Teachers and SNAs to questions which identified the current and desired roles of SNAs in PE.

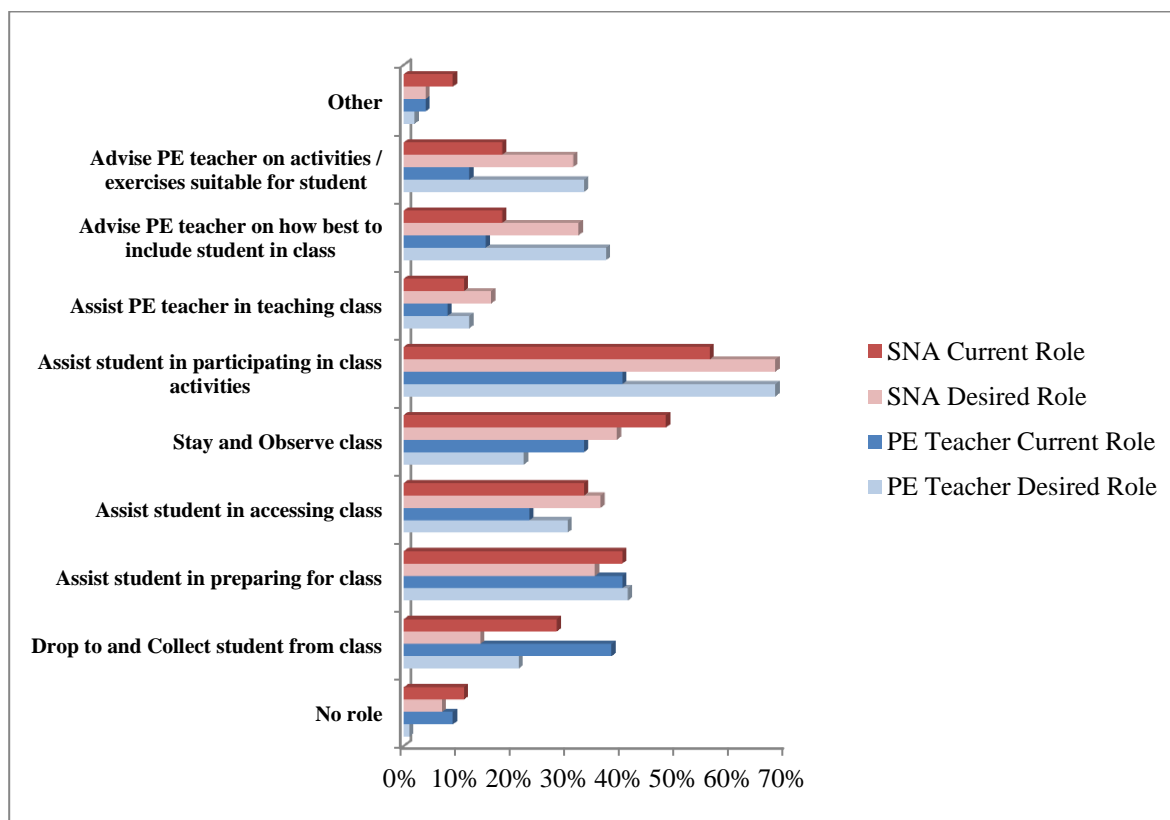


Figure 4.11. PE Teachers and SNAs perceptions of the current role Vs the desired role of the SNA in PE.

Of particular interest in figure 11 above is the role “Assist student in participating in class activities”. 68% of PE teachers identified this as a desired role for SNAs in PE while 40% indicated that SNAs currently fulfil this role in PE. Similarly 56% of SNAs stated this was a role they currently played in PE but 68% of SNAs stated it was a role they would like to play.

Another notable difference between current and desired role could be seen with “Advise the PE teacher on how best to include the student with SEN.”, with 15% of PE teachers selecting this was currently done and 37% stating they would like the SNA to do this and likewise with SNAs 18% selecting this as a role they currently played and 32% stating it was a role they would like to play.

Additionally, *“Advising PE teacher on activities/exercises suitable for students”* was a role which 12% of PE Teachers stated was currently played by SNAs in PE with 33% stating they would like it to be a role SNAs played. This was reflected by SNAs with 18% stating it was a role currently played and 31% stating it was a role they would like to play in PE.

Furthermore there was an evident decrease between current role and desired role as selected by SNAs and PE teachers in relation to the selection of roles which could be perceived as being less active in PE including “No Role”, “Stay and Observe class” and “Drop to and Collect student from class”.

4.2.5.3 Factors Influencing the Role of SNAs in PE

Factors selected by SNAs and PE teachers

PE Teachers and SNAs were asked to rate which factors may encourage SNA’s to play more of a role in PE, from a list of four options, using a 5 point likert scale from 1=Most Important to 5=Not Important. Missing values for this question ranged from 17%-29%.

“Training of SNAs in how to include students with SEN in PE” was the factor which emerged as having the greatest influence on encouraging the role of the SNA in PE, with 66% of SNAs and 46% of PE teachers selecting this factor as being “Most Important”. Figure 4.12. Illustrates the comparisons of SNA and PE teachers’ perception of the factors which would encourage the role of the SNA in PE.

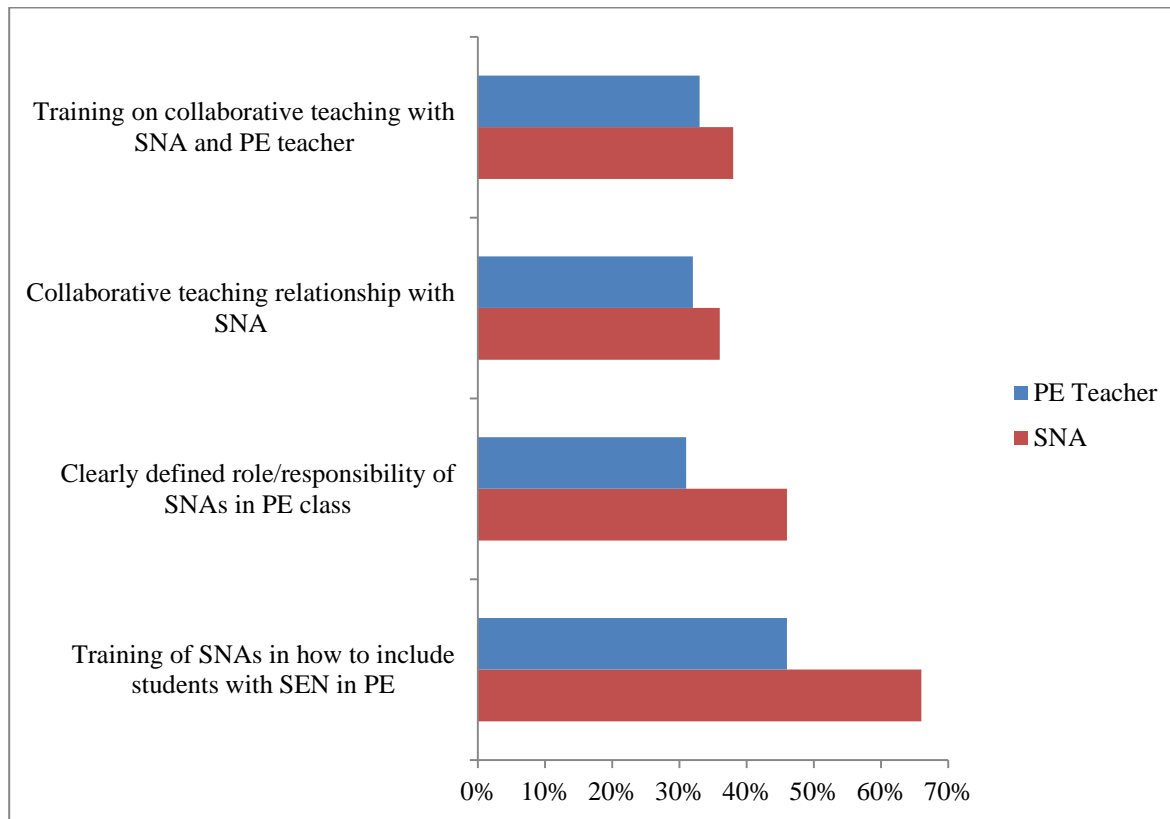


Figure 4.12. Percentage of SNAs and PE teachers who selected factors which would encourage the role of the SNA in PE as “Most Important”.

To identify if there were any statistically significant differences in SNAs and PE teachers selections of the factors which would encourage the role of the SNA in PE, a Mann-Whitney U-test was conducted. The test results illustrated that SNAs were statistically more likely to perceive “*Training of SNAs in how to include students with SEN in PE*” ($U=26472.5$, $p=.000$) and “*Clearly defined roles/responsibilities of SNAs in PE class*” ($U=23588$, $p=.001$) as being important factors in encouraging the role of the SNA in PE than PE teachers were.

Reasons chosen for SNA not playing an active role in PE

In attempting to identify reasons why PE Teachers and SNAs may not want SNAs to play a role in PE, both participants were asked “If you would not like the SNA to

play a role in PE class, please rate the reasons for this” from a list of six options and using a 5 point Likert scale. The sample of PE teachers that responded to this question ranged from n=88 to n=93 and the average sample of SNAs who responded to this question ranged from n=85 to n=100. Valid percentages for all responses are presented.

The reason which was most frequently selected as being “Most important” by the sample of SNAs (43%,) and PE Teachers (27%) was “students do not need SNA in class” followed by “students do not want SNA in class” 30% SNAs and 25% PE Teachers. See Figure 4.13 below for a full breakdown of responses.

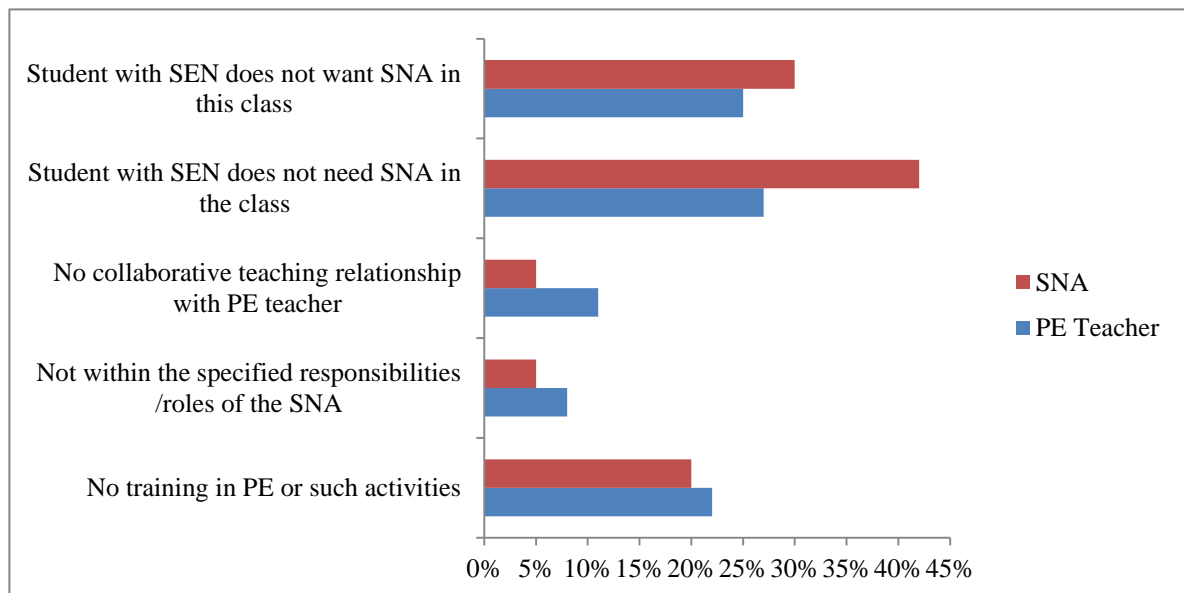


Figure 4.13. SNA and PE Teacher perceptions of reasons for SNA not to play a role in PE.

To explore whether there were any statistically significant differences between SNAs and PE teachers’ responses towards reasons for SNAs not to play a role in PE, a Mann-Whitney U test was employed. The results illustrated that PE teachers were statistically more likely than SNAs to perceive that SNAs should not play a

role in PE for the following reasons: “*Not within their specified responsibilities*” (U=2213.5, p=.000) and “*no collaborative relationship with the PE teacher*” (U=2785, p=.029).

Delegation of SNA Duties

SNAs and PE teachers were asked “*Who primarily decides the duties and responsibilities of SNAs?*”

SNA responses indicated that the principal (62%), followed by the resource teacher (43%) and the classroom teacher (33%) were the main people responsible. Respondents who selected other (19%) indicated that the SEN coordinator had this responsibility. PE teachers predominantly selected themselves as this person (61%), followed by 25% choosing the resource teacher and 19% selecting the Principal.

A Pearson Chi Squared test was conducted to see if there was a statistically significant association between PE teachers and SNAs selection of the people primarily responsible for delegating duties to SNAs. The results of the test indicated that SNAs were statistically more likely to select Principal ($\chi^2 (1, N = 490) = 82.184, p = .000$) and Resource Teacher ($\chi^2 (1, N = 490) = 15.213, p = .000$) than PE teachers. Whereas, PE teachers were statistically more likely to select Classroom Teacher ($\chi^2 (1, N = 490) = 36.436, p = .000$).

A full outline of the responses can be seen in the table 4.12.

Table. 4.12 SNAs and PE teachers' selection of person responsible for delegating duties of SNAs.

	Principal	Classroom Teacher	Students with SEN	Parents	SNA	Resource Teacher	Other
SNA	62% (N=196)	33% (N=101)	7% (N=23)	9% (N=27)	20% (N=62)	43% (N=135)	19% (N=60)
PE Teacher	19% (n=33)	61% (N=105)	8% (N=14)	5% (N=9)	20% (N=34)	25% (N=43)	6% (N=12)

To explore whether there was a significant relationship between SNAs selection of the person in charge of delegating duties to SNAs and the roles selected for SNAs in PE, a Pearson Chi-Squared test was employed. The results indicated that there were many statistically significant relationships ($p < .001$ to $p < .05$) between the current roles of the SNA in PE and the person who was selected as delegating the roles of the SNA, from the perspective of the SNA. The analysis of this data illustrated that the many different combinations of people who can be in charge of delegating roles to SNAs has the potential to largely influence the roles which SNAs fulfil in PE.

One of the findings of particular interest in was the impact on the role of the SNA in PE when "Parent of student with SEN" was selected as the person responsible for delegating SNA duties, with the roles of *Assist student in preparation for PE*, *Assist student with access to class*, *Assist PE teacher in teaching class*, *Advise PE teacher on inclusion*, *Advise PE teacher on suitable activities*, *Assist Student with participation in class* and *No Role*, being selected between 15%-30% more in comparison to the general SNA questionnaire sample.

Additionally, when “student with SEN” was selected as the person responsible for delegating the roles of the SNA in PE, the roles including; “*Assist student with access to class*”, “*Assist PE teacher in teaching class*”, “*Advise PE teacher on suitable activities*” and “*No Role*”, were selected between 12-30% more in these cases in comparison to the general SNA questionnaire sample.

Furthermore, it is interesting to note the impact of the selection of “classroom teacher” as the person responsible for delegating the roles of the SNA in PE on the roles which involve working in collaboration with the PE teacher, such as “*Assist PE teacher in teaching class*,” “*Advise PE teacher on inclusion*” and “*Advise PE teacher on suitable activities*”, with these roles being selected between 8-11% more frequently in these cases than the general SNA questionnaire sample.

The specific relationships which were found to be statistically significant are presented in more detail in Table 4.13

Table 4.13. Role of SNA in PE based on person they selected who delegates the duties of SNAs

Roles fulfilled by SNA in PE	Person responsible for delegating roles of SNA	% of SNAs who fulfilled role	% of entire SNA Sample who fulfilled role	Pearson Chi-Squared Result
Assist student in preparation for PE	<i>Principal</i>	44% of SNAs	<i>40% of SNAs</i>	$\chi^2 (1, N = 316) = 4.030, p = .045$
	<i>Classroom Teacher</i>	50% of SNAs		$\chi^2 (1, N = 316) = 7.633, p = .006$
	<i>Parent</i>	67% of SNAs		$\chi^2 (1, N = 316) = 9.075, p = .003$
	<i>Resource Teacher</i>	47% of SNAs		$\chi^2 (1, N = 316) = 4.983, p = .026$
Assist student with access to class	<i>Parent</i>	63% of SNAs	<i>33% of SNAs</i>	$\chi^2 (1, N = 316) = 12.075, p = .001$
	<i>Student with SEN</i>	57% of SNAs		$\chi^2 (1, N = 316) = 6.263, p = .012$
	<i>Classroom Teacher</i>	46% of SNAs		$\chi^2 (1, N = 316) = 11.197, p = .001$
	<i>Principal</i>	37% of SNAs		$\chi^2 (1, N = 316) = 4.390, p = .036$

	Resource Teacher	42% of SNAs		$\chi^2 (1, N=316)= 9.254, p=.002$
Drop to and Collect	Classroom Teacher	40% of SNAs	28% of SNAs	$\chi^2 (1, N=316)= 10.874, p=.001$
Assist PE teacher in teaching class	Student with SEN	35% of SNAs		$\chi^2 (1, N=316)= 14.909, p=.000$
	Classroom Teacher	17% of SNAs	11% of SNAs	$\chi^2 (1, N=316)= 7.179, p=.007$
	Parent	30% of SNAs		$\chi^2 (1, N=316)= 10.948, p=.001$
	SNA	19% of SNAs		$\chi^2 (1, N=316)= 5.935, p=.015$
Advise PE teacher on inclusion	Parent	41% of SNAs	18% of SNAs	$\chi^2 (1, N=316)= 10.729, p=.001$
	Classroom Teacher	28% of SNAs		$\chi^2 (1, N=316)= 11.409, p=.001$
Advise PE teacher on suitable activities	Parent	48% of SNAs		$\chi^2 (1, N=316)= 17.488, p=.000$
	Classroom Teacher	29% of SNAs	18% of SNAs	$\chi^2 (1, N=316)= 11.832, p=.001$

	<i>Student with SEN</i>	48% of SNAs		$\chi^2 (1, N = 316) = 14.377, p = .000$
Assist Student with participation in class	<i>Parent</i>	74% of SNAs	<i>56% of SNAs</i>	$\chi^2 (1, N = 316) = 4.041, p = .044$
No Role	<i>Parent</i>	26% of SNAs		$\chi^2 (1, N = 316) = 6.177, p = .013$
	<i>Student with SEN</i>	26% of SNAs	<i>11% of SNAs</i>	$\chi^2 (1, N = 316) = 5.306, p = .021$

Age of SNA and PE Teacher

Independent T-tests were conducted to evaluate whether a statistically significant difference existed between the age of SNAs and PE teachers and the current and desired roles which SNAs currently fulfilled in PE.

The results indicated that there was no statistically significant differences between the age of the SNAs and the roles which they currently fulfilled in PE ($P=.172$ to $P=.917$).

However, the results did specify a statistically significant difference between PE teachers age and the role they would like SNAs to play in PE: $t(137.100)= 2.558$, $p=.012$. PE teachers who were older ($M=36.63$, $SD=9.216$) were more likely to want SNAs to play the role of “Assist student in participation” in PE class than PE teachers who were younger.

Gender of SNAs and PE teacher

To identify whether any statistically significant relationship existed between the gender of SNAs and PE teachers and the roles of SNAs in PE, a Pearson Chi Squared test was conducted. The results of the test illustrated just two statistically significant relationships between gender of SNAs and PE teachers and current and desired roles of SNA in PE.

Analysis of the results of SNAs gender and their roles in PE, indicated that of the SNAs who selected the current role in PE to be “Assist PE teacher in teaching the PE class” , 28.5% were male and 9.7% were female, a finding which was stated to be statistically significant: $X^2(1, N=307)= 7.101$, $p=.008$.

Analysis of the test results exploring gender of PE teachers and roles of SNAs in PE indicated that 41% of PE teachers who were Male selected the desired role of

the SNA to be to “advise the PE teacher on suitable activities for the student with SEN” in comparison to 27% of female PE teachers., a finding which was stated to be statistically significant: $X^2 (1, N=170) = 3.851a, p=.050$.

Type of SEN of students

To explore whether there was a statistically significant relationship between the type of SEN of students with whom SNAs worked and the SNAs role in PE, a Pearson Chi-Squared test was employed.

The results of the test indicated that there were many statistically significant relationships ($p<.01$ to $p<.05$) between the current roles of the SNA in PE and the type of SEN of the students with whom they worked.

Analysis of the data illustrates that SNAs who worked with students with EBD were statistically more likely than the entire SNA sample of this study, to fulfil the roles of “Stay and Observe Class” ($X^2 (1, N=316) = 3.850, p=.050$) and “Assist student in participation in class” ($X^2 (1, N=316) = 4.873, p=.027$). Whereas SNAs who reported working with students with Autism were statistically more likely to fulfil the roles of “Drop to and Collect student from PE class” ($X^2 (1, N=316) = 8.189, p=.004$) and “Assist student in preparation for PE class” ($X^2 (1, N=316) = 4.950, p=.026$). A further example of a relationship which emerged from the analysis was SNAs who worked with students with Physical Disabilities who were found to be statistically more likely, than the general SNA population in this study, to fulfil the roles of “Assist student in preparation for class” ($X^2 (1, N=316) = 5.939, p=.015$) and “Assist student with access to class” ($X^2 (1, N=316) = 8.230, p=.004$).

For a full overview of the statistically significant relationships between SEN type of students and roles fulfilled by SNAs in PE, see Table 4.14 below.

Table 4.14 Statistically significant relationships between type of SEN of students that SNAs worked with and the role SNAs fulfilled in PE.

Roles fulfilled by SNA in PE	SEN Type of Student SNA worked with	% of SNAs working with SEN type who fulfilled role	% of entire SNA sample who fulfilled role	Pearson Chi-Squared Result
“Stay and Observe Class”	<i>Emotional and Behavioural Disorders (EBD)</i>	52% of SNAs	48% of SNAs	$X^2 (1, N = 316) = 3.850, p = .050$
	<i>Specific Learning Disability (SLD)</i>	34% of SNAs	28% of SNAs	$X^2 (1, N = 316) = 4.573, p = .032$
“Drop to and Collect”	<i>Autism</i>	33% of SNAs		$X^2 (1, N = 316) = 8.189, p = .004$
“Assist student in preparation for class”	<i>Physical Disability</i>	47% of SNAs		$X^2 (1, N = 316) = 5.939, p = .015$
	<i>Specific Speech and Learning Disorder</i>	49% of SNAs		$X^2 (1, N = 316) = 4.108, p = .043$
	<i>Autism</i>	44% of SNAs	40% of SNAs	$X^2 (1, N = 316) = 4.950, p = .026$

“Assist student in participation in class”	<i>Specific Learning Disability (SLD)</i>	62% of SNAs		$X^2 (1, N = 316) = 5.160, p = .023$
	<i>Specific Speech and Learning Disorder (SSLD)</i>	67% of SNAs	56% of SNAs	$X^2 (1, N = 316) = 5.312, p = .021$
	<i>Emotional and Behavioural Disorders (EBD)</i>	61% of SNAs		$X^2 (1, N = 316) = 4.873, p = .027$
“Assist student with access to class”	<i>Physical Disability</i>	41% SNAs	33% of SNAs	$X^2 (1, N = 316) = 8.230, p = .004$
“Assist PE Teacher in teaching class”	<i>Assessed Syndromes</i>	3% of SNAs	11% of SNAs	$X^2 (1, N = 316) = 5.030, p = .025$
	<i>Sensory Disabilities</i>	5% of SNAs		$X^2 (1, N = 316) = 3.989, p = .046$

<i>“Advise PE Teacher on Inclusion”</i>	<i>Assessed Syndromes</i>	9% of SNAs	<i>18% of SNAs</i>	$\chi^2 (1, N = 316) = 4.046, p = .044$
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4.2.6 Summary

In summary, this section outlined all the results which were obtained from the questionnaires completed by a sample of 193 PE Teachers and 330 SNAs. Results were presented under key sections including (1) the profiles of PE teachers and SNAs (2) the inclusion profile and inclusion practices of the participants schools (3) inclusion in PE (4) the role of the SNA in mainstream education and (5) the role of the SNA in PE. The main aim of this research, was to explore the role of the SNA in PE, the findings presented highlight unique insights into the current and desired roles of SNAs in PE and the factors which may influence these roles.

Overall, while some statistically significant differences existed between the perceptions of the PE teachers and SNAs with regard to the roles of SNAs in PE, it can be concluded from the data that SNAs are currently playing a largely active role in assisting students with SEN to participate in PE and in assisting students with SEN to prepare for PE. In addition to this, the results indicate a desire, by SNAs and PE Teachers, to increase the role of the SNA in PE, in particular in relation to assisting the participation of students with SEN in PE and also in advising PE Teachers on how best to include students with SEN in the PE class.

Of significant interest on the subject of the SNA in PE, was the notion that SNAs sometimes do not have a role in PE due to the student with SEN not needing or wanting their support, as opposed to in other subjects. In addition, the influence of the individual needs of students with SEN on the role of the SNA was also highlighted through the exploration of the role of the SNA in mainstream education. Here it was indicated that the most important role of the SNA was “Assisting students with SEN with specific difficulties individual to student”. Results from the inferential statistics also supported the concept that the individual needs of students with SEN is key to determining the role of the SNA in PE with statistically

significant relationships being found between many of the SEN types of students that SNAs worked with and the roles which SNAs fulfilled in PE.

Overall a significant majority of both SNAs and PE Teachers stated that they believed SNAs had an important role to play on the inclusion of students with SEN into PE, with PE teachers with more years teaching experience in particular being found to have statistically higher perceptions of the importance of the role of the SNA in PE. With regards to factors which would encourage SNAs to have a more active role in PE, the results indicated that training on inclusion in PE, for both the PE Teachers and SNAs, was the most important, followed by the SNAs having a clearly defined role in PE. In relation to training in inclusion in PE it was found that the majority of PE Teachers had received such training but felt it wasn't adequate, whilst the overwhelming majority of SNAs had not received any training in this regard.

Other factors which were found to have a statistically significant relationship with the roles of the SNA in PE were the SNAs perceptions of who was responsible for delegating their duties, the age of PE teachers and gender of PE teachers and SNAs.

4.3 Qualitative Data

Thematic analysis of the focus groups and interviews conducted with SNAs, along with qualitative comments from the PE teachers and SNAs questionnaires, were used to develop themes. The themes are presented under the following topics which address the foci of this research: Inclusion profile and inclusion practices of post primary schools; Inclusion in PE; SNA in mainstream education (roles and responsibilities and factors influencing role); and SNA in PE (roles and responsibilities and factors influencing role). A summary of all themes/subthemes, and the topic they are relevant to, can be seen in Table 4.15.

Table 4.15. Summary of Themes and Subthemes from qualitative data.

<u>Topic</u>	<u>Sub topic</u>	<u>Theme</u>	<u>Subtheme</u>
Inclusion Practices in Schools		Negative Staff Attitudes towards SEN	
		Inconsistent IEP Development procedures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unofficial Input from SNAs • Lack of IEPs for PE
Inclusion in PE	<i>Factors that promote inclusion</i>	Use of Peer Support and encouragement	
		Valuing importance of PE	
		Non-active participatory Role in PE	
		Planning, Adaptation and Communication	
		Curriculum, Class Plan and Communication of Plan	

SNA in Mainstream Education	<i>Factors that hinder inclusion in PE</i>	Individual Challenges of SEN Inclusion Confusion Lack of Training	
	<i>Roles and Responsibilities</i>	Facilitating Learning Assisting Teacher and Whole Class Enabling Inclusion Source of Support for students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Differentiation and Adaptation • Facilitating smooth learning environment for all • Discrete inclusion • Empowerment and Advocacy of student • Care Needs, Access and Physical Assistance

	<p><i>Factors Influencing Roles and Responsibilities</i></p>	<p>Individual to students needs</p> <p>Curricular roles v actual roles</p> <p>Teacher and SNA Relationship</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stretched SNA hours over a number of students • Teacher not wanting SNA
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<p>SNA in PE</p>	<p><i>Roles and Responsibilities</i></p>	<p>Assisting student participation</p> <p>Assist whole class and PE Teacher</p> <p>Health and Safety</p> <p>No Role</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivering separate programme • SNA participation in the lesson • Demonstration, Adaptation and Encouragement • Communicate needs of SEN student to teacher • Controlling behavior
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	<i>Factors influencing role</i>	<p>Individual to SNA personality and strengths</p> <p>Perceived difference in PE participation for students with SEN</p> <p>Depends on individual needs of SEN student</p> <p>Training/Knowledge</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • •
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4.3.1 Inclusion Practices of Post Primary Schools

The themes which were developed under the topic of inclusive practices in schools were as follows:

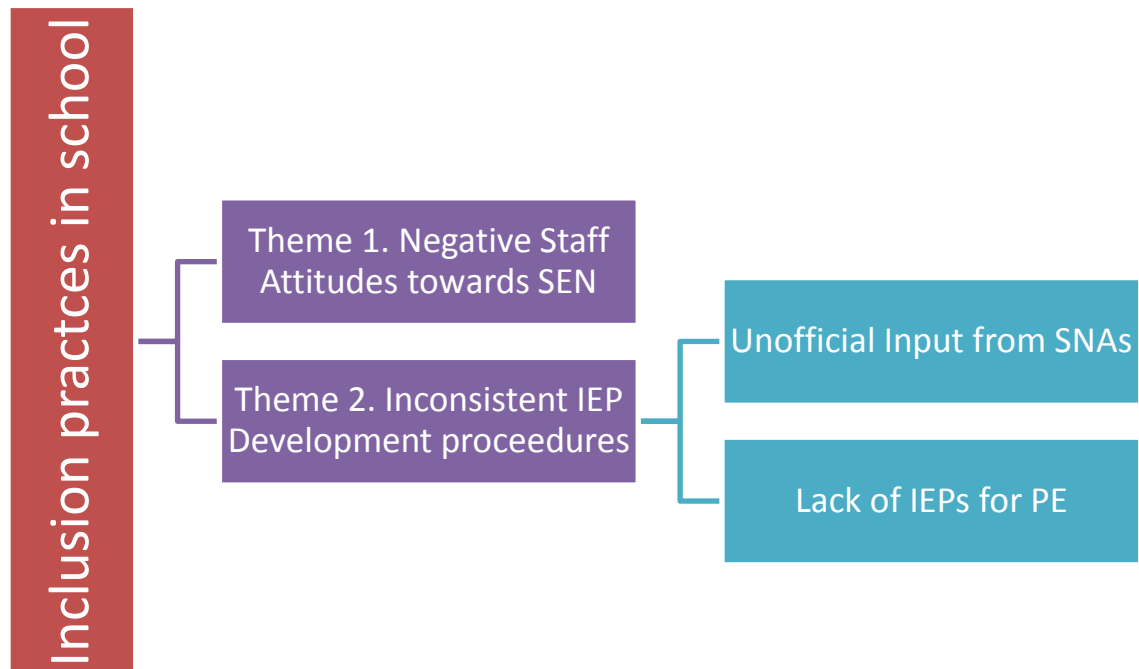


Figure 4.15. Illustration of the themes identified on the topic inclusion practices in schools.

Theme 1: Negative attitudes towards SEN

The notion of the presence of negative attitudes towards students with SEN was explored in the focus group with SNAs. The analyses revealed that there appeared to be a failure of staff to recognize and accept the needs of students with SEN, in particular those with behavioral needs, often doubting whether it is a “real” disability:

“Some teachers just don’t seem to think the special need a child might have is a real special educational need! I have been asked that question so many times, is that a real problem? Is that a real special need? And you’d be looking saying yes, obviously. That’s why I’m here to help.” (Focus Group 1, SNA)

Participants felt that there was a real difference of attitude towards students with a physical disability and those with behavioural special needs due to the “visibility” of the disability:

“Yes, sometimes it’s hard if the need is not a visible need, like I have worked with a student who had a physical need and then I’ve worked with a child who had a behavioural problem, with an emotional need... It’s very hard in that case because it’s only really evident to everyone else around in relation to the physical need that there actually is something there. But the other need, the behavioural need, questions are always posed trying to seek out whether the child is just playing up on the behavioural issues, are they taking advantage of it? Is it real or not?” (Focus Group 1, SNA)

It appeared that participants felt that rather than having issues with attitudes of acceptance from other students the real issues tended to come from the “adults” in the school:

“You could spend all that time trying to get them accepted by the other children in the class and yet the adults in the school won’t accept them, that is an issue that we often face.” (Focus Group 1, SNA)

Theme 2: Inconsistent IEP development procedures.

The topic of Individual Education Plans (IEPs) was discussed in the focus groups with mixed insights being revealed. It appeared to be a common opinion amongst the SNA’s who took part in this research that IEPs were not regularly completed for

students in second level despite the fact that they are recommended to be completed for all students with SEN under the EPSEN Act 2004:

“When I started first, we had IEP’s for everyone, we had files and files, but I haven’t actually done an IEP in 8 years I’d say!” (Focus Group 1, SNA)

“... to be honest, they’re not really done! They’re not compulsory to do them in secondary level, they are in primary but not secondary” (Interview 1, SNA)

“We don’t do them anymore! We used to do them years ago, I haven’t seen one in the last 5 years!” (Focus Group 1, SNA)

Another common perception was that while IEPs were not seen to be completed very much, there was a focus on “Care plans” for students, which were referred to by different names in different schools but were essentially an individual plan for students with SEN which were “not as official” as IEP’s (SNA, interview 1).

Sub-theme: Unofficial input from SNAs

In relation to the level of input from SNAs, for those who did have IEPs for the students they worked with, it seemed to be predominantly the case that SNAs were not formally asked to contribute to the IEP development of students. However, in many cases the SNAs would be informally asked for input from the teachers in relation to the student’s individual needs.

“Depending on the teacher, you might be asked for your advice or you might be asked to sit in a meeting” (Interview 2, SNA)

“..Teachers actually normally come to us for advice, if they’re having problems with them in the class they’ll usually come to us for advice, but then on the other hand we’re not involved in the official development of the IEP...” (Focus Group 1, SNA)

Sub-theme: Lack of IEP’s for PE

In relation to IEPs for PE, it appeared these were not completed in the schools in which the participants of this research worked, with participants commenting that “we don’t have any” or that the plans for PE are a “work in progress” (SNA/PE teacher, questionnaire).

However, one participant in the focus groups suggested that exercise might be referred to on some of the individual plans or recommendations for an Occupational Therapist but nothing specific to PE.

“I’d say it would be more OT relevant, or maybe they might recommend short exercise breaks or something like that... I could be wrong now, but as far as I remember I don’t think I’ve seen PE on an IEP.”

In summary, the topic of inclusive practices in schools highlighted a number of key points. For example, in relation to attitudes, it was evident that staff members often had negative attitudes towards students with SEN, in particular if the needs are behavioural rather than physical needs. Additionally, with regard to IEP development it appeared that these were not completed rigorously in the majority of cases, with the SNAs input being unofficial if they had an input at all.

4.3.2 Inclusion in PE

The focus groups and interviews conducted with SNAs allowed for a greater insight into some of the important themes relating to the inclusion of students with SEN in

mainstream PE. These themes can be divided into factors which promote and hinder inclusion in PE. An outline of these themes are illustrated in Figure 4.14

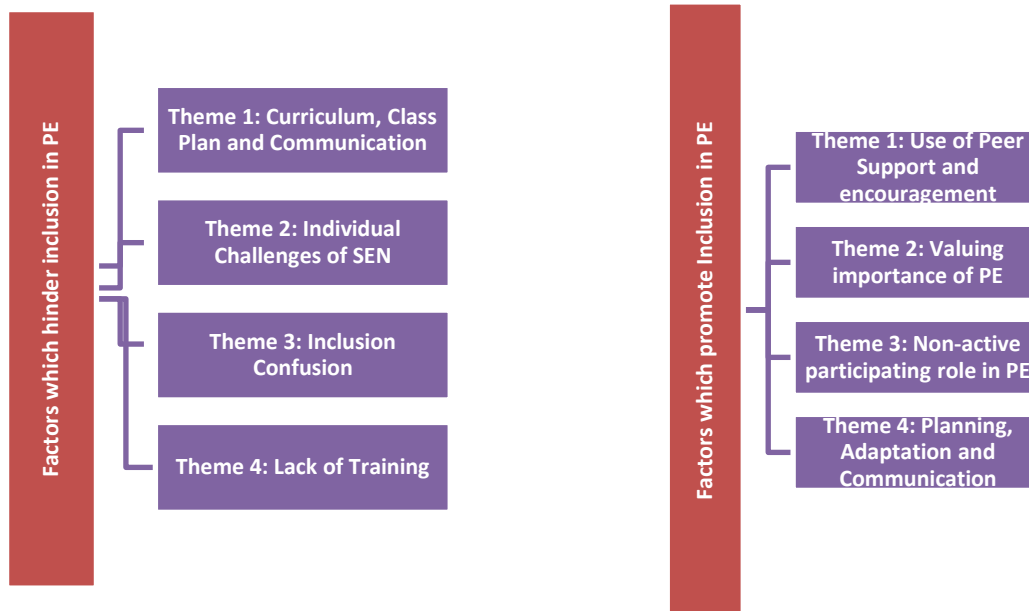


Figure 4.16. Illustration of themes identified on the topic of Inclusion in PE.

4.3.2.1 Factors which hinder Inclusion in PE

Theme 1: Curriculum, Class Plan and Communication

SNAs reported that it was difficult for PE teachers to develop a class plan that would suit the needs of all students in the class, in particular to allow for inclusion of students with various different types of SEN. Many SNA participants referred to the need for PE teachers to implement the PE curriculum but stated that a number of the activities which are conducted as part of the “plan” (PE Curriculum) often did not suit the students with SEN:

“It can be hard to include a person in a wheelchair with a group of mainstream students and it can be really hard to get them involved in the likes of basketball or soccer and we have to stick to a curriculum you know of 6 weeks of this and 6 weeks of that and it can be hard to include them in everything” (Focus Group 2, SNA)

“I feel if there was a more flexible syllabus for them it might be easier to include our children with SEN. Because, we have children with Autism you know, we have children with Down’s Syndrome, and that doesn’t really suit them to be honest... It’s so difficult for the teacher because he/she is constantly trying to facilitate them... For example, if there was a dance class on they might hate the music, and say we have a class of six, four of them might be loving it, but two of them might be really suffering with the sound.” (Interview 2, SNA)

In addition to this, SNAs referred to the need to know in advance what the PE session was going to comprise of so that they could prepare themselves and their student. This however did not seem to happen most of the time and as a result sometimes caused a challenge to including students with SEN:

“In an ideal world, it would be great if the teacher could let us know the day before say, this is what we’re going to be doing tomorrow, this is the work for X student, etc.. But that doesn’t happen” (Focus Group 1, SNA)

“For example also if there’s a new sport being included, for example, for the past two weeks the PE teacher has introduced that TRX, which is absolutely mad

looking! Basically, that was a real obstacle, a complete spanner in the works to be honest. For me now, I've never done it, and I had a student who tried it and kind of rushed to it and got all tangled in it! I had to get him off it! That's a good example of a session I didn't know was happening and I came down the stairs and these contraptions were all assembled and I didn't know what to do" (Interview 1, SNA)

Theme 2: Personal challenges and choices

A number of personal challenges for the students with SEN appeared to be a barrier for inclusion in many cases. The predominant challenges which appeared to be associated with students with SEN included fear, physical ability and low motivation levels:

Fear:

"otherwise he would have just sat on the bench, and we would still be in the corner of the gym, still beside everyone. He just would say "I don't want to try football, I'm too afraid". (Focus Group 2, SNA)

Ability levels:

"They haven't actually got the physical ability to do the whole thing. To me he would find that frustrating, really is very demoralizing. I think everybody wants to do something that they can manage, so I think you have to bring it back a stage or two where we're starting at a very basic level."(Focus Group 5, SNA)

Low Motivation

"One of the lads just doesn't want to do much. You'll be trying to make an effort to include him and he will just turn around and say "no I'm not doing it" so you're at a loss then." (Focus Group 3, SNA)

Comments from both the PE Teachers and SNAs questionnaires with regard to inclusion in PE stated that the child's disability type, along with their own teaching experience, had a role to play in this level of inclusion. Additionally, a number of

comments mentioned that they felt some students with SEN chose to exclude themselves or in many cases refused to take part.

“When they choose to participate we accommodate them, but they make the personal choice not to participate.” (Questionnaire, PE Teacher)

“I include them but sometimes pupils exclude themselves and it depends on their SEN” (Questionnaire, PE Teacher)

“They are involved and included but will exclude themselves sometimes over a fear of getting hurt” (Questionnaire, SNA)

“Sometimes students choose not to be included” (Questionnaire, SNA)

Such examples highlight the concept of student autonomy and choice when it comes to participation in PE.

Theme 3: Inclusion Confusion

A number of participants referred to the fact that often times the best way to get a student with SEN involved was to offer them a separate activity either with a small group or individually. In line with this some participants expressed concern over whether this was inclusion or exclusion as they were not doing the same as everyone else in PE, rather they were taking part in their own activity in the same environment as others.

“I sometimes feel like are we doing the right thing. Like are we excluding him by letting him do badminton or whatever for 60 minutes while everyone else plays soccer but he can’t play soccer and I don’t really know what the right thing to do in that situation. Like often then a number of the students would come over and play with him so then we would have 2 small groups.” (Focus Group 4, SNA)

Unknowingly participants here were referring to what is known in the literature as the inclusion spectrum (Black and Stevenson, 2011). This means that inclusion can happen at different levels from full inclusion in some activities to partial inclusion using separate activities suitable to the student with SEN in the same environment. This will be discussed in more detail in the discussion chapter.

Theme 4: Lack of training on inclusion in PE

The need for more training, as alluded to in previous sections, was again a prevalent issue in the comments in the questionnaires of PE Teachers:

“I think far more needs to be done to train teachers and SNAs in adapted PE. Regular training and updates on best practice are essential. While my training in UL was useful, it wasn't remotely extensive enough for the variety of issues I have dealt with over the last 10 years. Much of what I have done in terms of inclusion is based on improvisation and internet research.” (Questionnaire, PE Teacher)

“Training in this area would be highly beneficial for myself as a PE teacher and would also enhance the experience for the student with SEN” (Questionnaire, PE Teacher)

Interestingly in relation to training and education in inclusive PE, it was frequently mentioned in the questionnaire comments that more training was needed and that the modules as part of their degree were not given enough time for practical classes:

“I feel we should have done a lot more practice of this. I did work with adults with disabilities which was excellent but not related to a school setting.” (Questionnaire, PE Teacher)

“...it was very short. I really enjoyed the module and would have preferred a longer one.”(Questionnaire, PE Teacher)

4.3.2.2 Factors which promote inclusion in PE

Theme 1: Peer support and encouragement

SNAs referred to many occasions where positive support and encouragement from other students/peers occurred as a result of inclusion:

“I have to say, she gave everything a go, one day in particular she actually hit the tennis ball over the net and myself, the PE teacher and all the other children all cheered, it was brilliant, she was thrilled!” (Focus Group 1, SNA)

“We have another child who’s partially sighted, and she plays the last game of basketball and she’d be out on the court and people would just call her and she’d put her hands up for the ball. They want to include her constantly, it’s fantastic!”(Focus Group 1, SNA)

“One of our kids, he’s a third year, and he has Asperger’s and is on the autistic spectrum as well. He joined the basketball team recently, and I was a bit worried about it as I was thinking how would this go down with the other children, and it’s an official team and you have to be good to get onto the team, but I spoke to the coach and he was very willing and very good about it.We then had a big huge Leinster final that we got into, we had to go down to Tipperary on the bus and I went with him... He wasn’t on for a lot because it was a very important match but

the coach put him on, and when he got on everyone just cheered for him, he was so happy!” (Focus Group 2, SNA)

Peers being asked to support students with SEN in PE, was also stated as helping to foster positive attitudes and behaviours from the students without SEN:

“The PE Teacher asked him to help out with the student with SEN and he (student without SEN) is a very difficult student at times, but you wouldn't know that looking at him at PE.”(Focus Group 5, SNA)

“He was delighted with responsibility and helping and that he was chosen to help.” (Focus Group 5, SNA)

“Including a SEN student in PE class educates his/her peers on the acceptance of disabilities and how they can be incorporated to suit all. This has proven very beneficial to all in PE class.” (Questionnaire, SNA)

Theme 2: Valuing the Importance of PE for students with SEN

The benefits of PE for students with SEN was extensively discussed in the focus groups with participants referring to the fact that many students with SEN excel in PE a lot more so than in academic classes:

“They're a different child in PE, you never get into trouble in PE. It's a sense of freedom for them – particularly individuals with behavioural issues, they seem to excel in sports.” (Focus Group 2, SNA)

“What I find is some of the children that aren't academic or find it hard to settle in a class, they excel in PE. They love actually getting out there, and you see them perform and they behave very well” (Focus Group 2, SNA)

Many participants also alluded to the fact that PE was a good outlet for those students who had emotional and behavioural difficulties:

“They wanted to get rid of PE for him to lessen the load of his subject but I said no because I felt that he really needed that time”(Interview 6, SNA)

“It allows the student this time out and this free time to express themselves, and it created positive mental attitude for the students.” (Interview 6, SNA)

Additionally, although not directly attributed to PE but deemed important as it relates to physical activity which is a corner stone within the subject, some SNAs also mentioned the importance of physical activity breaks to combat behavioral issues:

“There’s another girl in our school with ADHD who gets very angry when she feels something isn’t going her way. So we have a boxing thing, so we bring her in and she hits it, or a ping pong table and five minutes later she’ll be back out and she’ll be much calmer!”(Focus Group 1, SNA)

Further to this it emerged from the data that PE appeared to be a positive platform to allow relationship building between the SNA and the student and a platform for inclusion in general:

“It offers a platform for inclusion because it’s informal and people leave their guard down during PE” (Interview 6, SNA)

“I think it is really important and from my experience it was really through PE that I really achieved something with my student” (Interview 6, SNA)

In addition to the focus group discussions, comments in the PE Teacher questionnaires also alluded to the importance of PE for students with SEN, with many commenting that they felt it was even more important as it allows socialisation, interaction and a space to express oneself:

“Often the only class where they are socially able to mix with their peers “
(Questionnaire, PE Teacher)

“If not more important as it is key to developing relationships with peers i.e. team work”(Questionnaire, PE Teacher)

“It can provide valuable opportunities for social engagement that they may not receive in some academic classes”(Questionnaire, PE Teacher)

Theme 3: Non-active Participating Roles

The option of offering students with SEN a non-active participatory role in PE emerged from the focus groups as an alternative method to encourage involvement in PE. A non-active participatory role is one in which the student is present for PE class but participates in roles where they are not actively engaged in the given team or individual activity.

“Even give them a job if the children are too nervous to take part. They can do the time-keeping or they can press the button or they can be a referee.” (Focus Group 2, SNA)

“One of our students, he would not even play, he just loves the fact that he’s going off to the matches with the water bottles. He loves it, he’s filling them up, he’s just really proud of himself.” (Focus Group 2, SNA)

Theme 4: Planning, Adapting and Communicating

Many “Good Inclusion” stories were shared during the focus groups and interviews which highlighted some of the practices in PE which can help to facilitate inclusion. Such practices included the preparation of individualised plans:

“The PE teacher does all different fitness classes and stuff like that, and from first year everyone will have their own individual plan and that includes the child with SEN. One girl I work with has a plan that sets out exactly what she can do, the child knows her disability herself and she plays football,” (Focus Group 1, SNA)

Adapting activities to suit the needs of students with SEN was also mentioned as being a big help for inclusion:

“I find that our PE teachers are fantastic. The other girls will be walking on beams during gymnastics say, but the teacher I’m working with will have set out another wider block for the child with SEN to walk on and I would hold her hand while she walked across.”(Focus Group 1, SNA)

It was also stated that having open communication between the SNA and PE Teacher regarding the students’ abilities and the lesson plans aided in including students with SEN:

“I’m also very lucky in my school as we have two PE teachers who are fantastic. They will say, ‘Can she do this?’ and will say ‘Let her give it a go, see if she can do it!’”(Focus Group 1, SNA)

“We have children with autism so they’d tell us maybe the day before, “We’ll be doing this tomorrow if you want to tell your boys”.” (Focus Group 2, SNA)

In summary this section highlighted a number of key factors which promoted and hindered the inclusion of students with SEN in PE. Those which were seen to hinder inclusion in PE comprised of a constrained PE curriculum delivery which often consisted of activities that did not suit students with SEN. It is important to make the distinction here that it is not the PE curriculum framework in itself which leads to exclusion; rather it is how the curriculum is delivered, such as a lack of adaptation/differentiation and too much emphasis on limited strands such as

games strand. Other factors which were key influences on hindering inclusion in PE were a lack of communication of the class plan or activities with the SNA and students with SEN, personal challenges and choices of students with SEN such as fear, lower fitness and low self-esteem and motivation, confusion of what was inclusion and what was exclusion and a lack of training in inclusion for the PE teachers and SNAs. Factors which were found to promote inclusion in PE consisted of the use of peer support and encouragement, valuing the importance of PE for students with SEN and the use of non-active participatory roles to enhance inclusion of students with SEN.

4.3.3 SNA in mainstream education

4.3.3.1 Roles and Responsibilities

The predominant themes and subthemes found in the data on the topic of SNA Roles and Responsibilities are as follows:

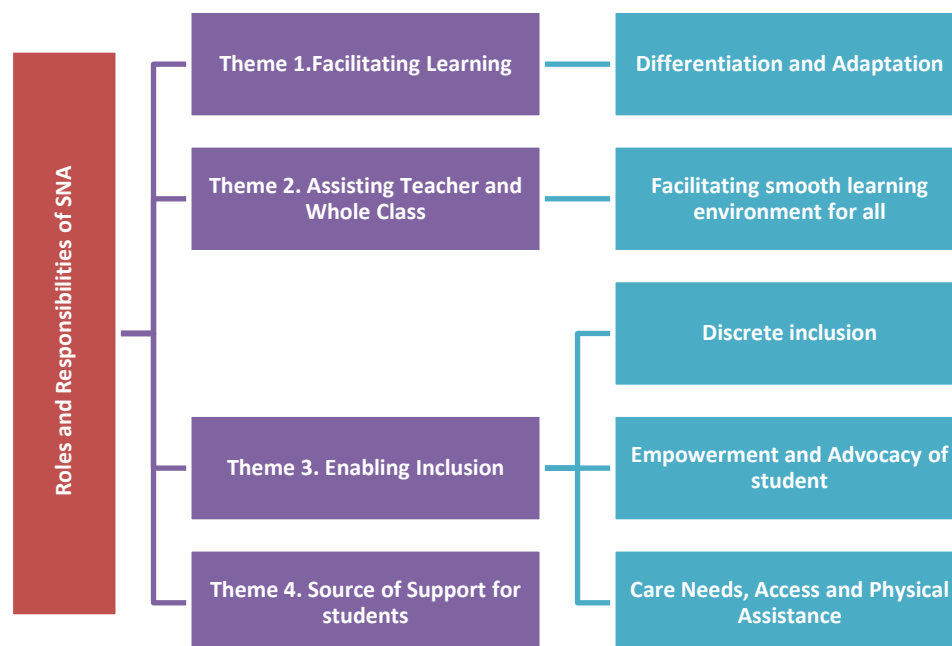


Figure 4.17. Illustration of themes identified on the topic of Roles and Responsibilities of SNA.

Theme 1 Facilitating learning

In relation to facilitating learning it was seen to be important for the SNAs to enable adequate and equal opportunity learning, at the level of the student:

“To be there to give them an opportunity to learn and to be provided with an adequate education.”

“Enabling them all the time to be as educated as they can at whatever level their level is”

“Helping them gain access to the curriculum”

At times helping the students gain access to the curriculum as mentioned above was achieved through adaptation and differentiation which is outlined in the subtheme below.

Sub-theme: Adaptation and Differentiation

In many instances it seemed that to enable students with SEN to learn, the SNAs felt it was needed to adapt the lessons, despite being aware that this was not within their job description:

“In fairness they are teaching to 30 and they can’t really adapt the whole lesson to suit everyone so that is kind of the SNA’s job is to adapt what the teacher does to suit the student.” (Interview 6, SNA)

"I have to say, in our school I do differentiate for the child, I just do it automatically in every class, and then the teacher will say, thanks very much. They do appreciate it when it's done, even though they should be doing it," (Focus Group 1, SNA)

"I would differentiate for the student that needs it, I know it's not my job title and it's not my role, but I feel like if I didn't the child would be sitting there staring at the floor." (Focus Group 1, SNA)

Theme 2 Assisting Teacher and Whole Class

The role of assisting the teacher was also referred to but in many instances it was indicated that this help came through assisting the student in the class or helping the teacher to help the student:

"I suppose, really, you do support the teacher in helping the child, I know you're only really supposed to be helping the child but generally you support the teacher carry out whatever needs be." (Interview 2, SNA)

"She (The teacher) doesn't think specifically about the child with special educational needs in the class and whether that child will understand the lesson or not, she will look to you to look after that child." (Focus Group 1, SNA)

Many references were also made to the fact that the SNA role involved helping the whole class and not just the students with SEN. It appeared this could happen directly through the SNA assisting more than just the child with SEN in the classrooms:

"I still think the mentality in the school here is that it seems you are there more for the whole class really" (Focus Group 3, SNA)

"By the end of the year you may have three or four students you're trying to watch. The children gravitate towards you, they're like "Oh my God she'll mind me". It's a comfort thing! (Focus Group 2, SNA)

“Often what happens is, if you go in and they’re doing a project, the other kids often look for your help too, so you’re helping everyone! That makes the child with SEN happy too, because then they don’t feel so segregated and “special”.” (Focus Group 1, SNA)

“it’s very hard you just want to help all the kids who need help and sometimes you can see who needs the help and they might not actually be the ones who have the SNA access and the one who does have the SNA you might never think had it, and you’re kind of supposed to be really just focused on that child, that’s what you’re there for and you’re supposed to forget about the rest of them really, but you cannot do that. It’s impossible really isn’t it?”. (Focus Group 3, SNA)

It was also evident that this assistance to the teacher and whole class frequently happened indirectly through the facilitation of a smooth learning environment for all by ensuring that students’ behavior does not disrupt other students in the class:

“...it stops students from going home and saying oh the class is always interrupted today because of the lad having tantrums” (Focus Group 1, SNA)

“...then often times an SNA might have to take a child out, because the teacher has to cater for the other children who want to become involved” (Interview 2, SNA)

Theme 3: Enabling inclusion

SNAs alluded to the fact that they felt one of their main responsibilities was to enable inclusion. In fulfilling this responsibility, various strategies were apparent as outlined in the subthemes below.

Discreet inclusion

One of the ways SNAs stated that they enabled students with SEN to be included was through the use of discrete strategies which could avoid students with SEN

“standing out” from others in the class. One such example of this could be seen in cases of behavior management:

“You are enabling them to learn, not just the student you work with but the whole class. For like say example if the student is having a bad day and might be about to have a bad tantrum or breakdown you can just discreetly remove the student from the class and the class can just continue to work and nothing will have happened to disrupt the class or to cause embarrassment to the student” (Interview 6, SNA)

Such strategies were also implemented at times to allow students with SEN to “fit in” in situations where the SNA might assist with general daily tasks in school:

“like maybe showing the children how to organise their locker...It means that theirs is the same as all the other lockers, theirs doesn’t stand out as being the untidy one, with papers hanging out the door, which can happen,...” (Focus Group 1, SNA)

Care Needs, Physical Assistance and Access

Attending to care and medical needs was also mentioned numerous times and in particular to its importance for enabling inclusion

“The only time we might help out is at the end when he’s changing his clothes. Now we’ve asked him does he want a separate changing room and he says ah no he’d miss all the craic in the changing room! He loves being part of it! The only thing he’d ask us is when he comes out afterwards, like his mum has his trousers adapted, like a Velcro fastening... and the mam makes sure he has his Velcro runners, but sometimes the trousers might be twisted or the collar might not be out on his shirt, which makes it difficult for him. He has zars syndrome so he has short

arms, so he finds it very difficult a lot of the time to fix his clothes... (Interview 3, SNA)

Responsibilities in relation to health were also highlighted:

“One of our students as well is a diabetic and is dependent on a pump so we have to watch out for her because with regard to her sugar levels, she can get a false high, which makes her very dizzy... So we have to watch her levels to make sure that she’s drinking enough or that her pump is working...” (Interview 3, SNA)

“There’s a boy in our school who has ADHD and the medication comes into us, and we must ensure that he takes his medication every morning.”(Focus Group 2, SNA)

At times it was also evident that SNAs were needed to offer physical assistance with access and use of equipment:

“...so we would set up his laptop for him, and help him pack up at the end of class but we wouldn’t stay during the middle of the class! Or if it’s a practical class, for instance in science, we might stay and help him set up the experiments and things like that and the same in home economics, while using knives, we’d have to assist him with that!”

Empowerment and advocacy

Enabling inclusion through the provision of skills and/or support to “give them their independence” was seen to be a “huge part” of the role of the SNA (Focus Group 1, SNA). Providing this empowerment to the students by helping them gain independence was fostered through simple encouragement and guidance to carry out tasks as explained by an SNA below:

“By telling them simple things like, you go knock on the teacher’s door and ask them to sign your journal, you go and you get your books from your locker, and they do it! You explain it to them, you do the little role play before they go and do it, and they feel so good!” (Focus Group1, SNA)

Interestingly on the topic of independence, it was eluded to that there is a slight contradiction in providing this support to encourage independence as once independence appears to be achieved by the student, the support is often withdrawn from them:

“..... then the SENO comes out and says, she’s gotten very independent, you don’t need your job anymore!!” (Focus Group 1, SNA)

Whereas a number of the SNAs agreed that without the support the level of independence being shown by the student can quickly diminish:

“if you’re taken away from that child who has developed such independence, their independence will go more times than not. They’re independent because you’re there providing them with the independence.” (Focus Group 1, SNA)

Theme 4: Supportive relationship for Students

Relationship building with the students with SEN was also noted as being a priority role

“Well, we’re not their teacher, you know, we have to be there for them all the time, they must feel very comfortable with us, they have to be able to approach us about anything, it’s not a mother relationship as such, but it’s not a teacher relationship either.” (Interview 1, SNA)

“We are there to help them and we do have to write reports up but they see us as different and they depend on us a lot more as well so it’s not like you’re their friend but you have a trust with them I think.” (Focus Group 3, SNA)

It was expressed that as a result of this relationship building, the SNA was a source of support to the students in many occasions. Sometimes through the provision of moral support and encouragement:

“She’s struggling as all she wants is to be a “normal” teenager and she finds it so hard. We’re constantly trying to reassure her that she is the same as everyone else, but she still does need support.”(Interview 3, SNA)

“I believe the SNA acts as a support, sometimes in the classroom, sometimes outside of the classroom, to make sure that they stay in the school or classroom, as appropriate to the situation at hand” (Focus Group 2, SNA)

And in other cases it was apparent that a lot of emotional support was needed and providing this was seen to be very important:

“There is so much emotional needs there, which isn’t really recognised. An SNA is really only assigned to a student based on their care needs. If they have a physical need and we find over time that a lot of the students do have other needs, a lot of emotional needs and support because they wouldn’t actually come to school if they didn’t have it!” (Interview 3, SNA)

“he is nervous of being on the corridor, so he panics if he is a few minutes late after the bell goes and he is not packed up and ready to go..... I would be there saying to him you know, don’t be panicking we will get you there, we will get you there, ... If I wasn’t there for him, he would have a nervous breakdown you know.” (Focus group 4, SNA)

This section looked at the role of the SNA in mainstream education and concluded that there were four predominant themes which described their role. Namely these were facilitating learning, assisting teacher and whole class, enabling inclusion and offering emotional support to students with SEN. These themes were further divided into subthemes which outlined ways in which these roles were fulfilled. Some of the prominent examples included differentiation of class materials to facilitate students learning, behavior management to provide a smooth learning

environment for all, assistance with all students who needed help in the classroom, enabling inclusion through meeting care needs, providing accessibility to the school environment and offering emotional support and encouragement to students who may need it. In summary the broad range of roles which were discussed and outlined in this section really highlights the diversity of the role of the SNA in mainstream education whilst also perhaps alluding to the fact that the role stretches far beyond its intended scope. The factors which influenced the role of the SNA in mainstream education according to the focus groups and interview participants, will be explored in the next section.

4.3.3.2 Factors influencing the role of the SNA

Factors which may affect the SNA role were also explored during the focus groups, with some common themes emerging as shown in Figure 20:

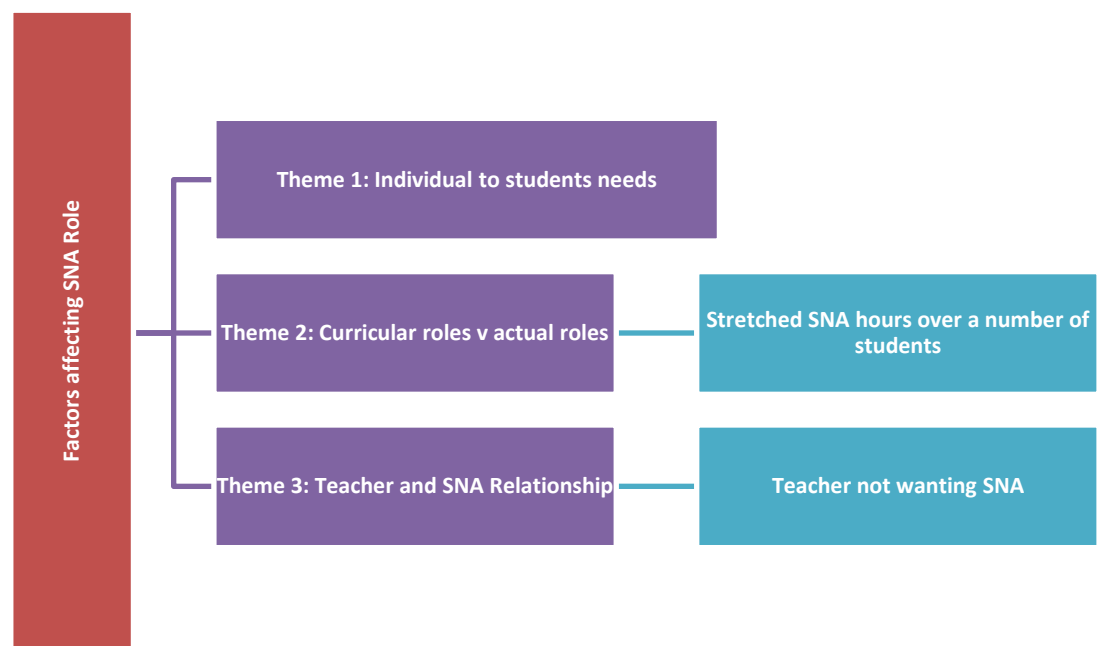


Figure 4.18. Illustration of themes identified which influence the role of the SNA

Theme 1: Individual to students needs

The individual needs of each student with SEN were stated to have a big influence on the role of the SNA:

“It completely depends on the child you’re working with, it depends on the disability!” (Focus Group 1, SNA)

“I worked with children before who would be in the middle of everything and loving it you know? And you could stand back a bit then and just let them at it, and I suppose then you’d be more of a classroom assistant, just checking that everyone’s ok you know? Obviously you would still be keeping an eye on that one specific child” (Interview 2, SNA).

Theme 2: Circular Roles V Actual Roles

SNA’s working outside of their job specification and circular roles was frequently mentioned as an issue. In many cases it appeared that the role being played by SNAs was at their own discretion and, where they felt there was a need, they would play a role which was beyond that of their job description. This is outlined in the example below:

“He can’t listen at the same time, so sometimes we will write for him while he’s listening... Now, whereas if our SENO was in the school, the SENO would say that’s not allowed, that the teacher should have notes prepared... But realistically, if there’s a conversation going on in the class and the teachers talking to the student that is not prepared, it’s spontaneous, and that child cannot write those notes, and listen and understand at the same time! It’s a need! He gets so frustrated when he can’t keep up and he can’t understand when the teacher is working so fast and conversations are going on, and if we can’t write for him, then he can’t listen and he eventually gets very frustrated. We’re not really meant to do something like that, it’s not in our job spec, but we’re trying to help out the child as

best as we can! In saying that, the teachers are okay for us to do that, but if the SENO comes down, they don't want that, they'd regard that as resource teaching, you know." (Interview 3, SNA)

This conflict of circular roles V actual roles was summed up by one SNA in the following comment:

"It's the whole thing of what the SNA is supposed to do as opposed to what the SNA actually does in practice." (Interview 2, SNA)

SNA stretched over number of students

The issue of ratios of students to SNAs was also raised as a concern in relation to the SNAs ability to fulfil certain roles. Many SNAs expressed the difficulties associated with students having shared SNA access, meaning that the SNA had to prioritize and select who to help:

Most classes have shared SNAs, shared with a few students,.....There is the question then is it fair to spend the whole time.....with (student 1) when the behavior of some of the others is impacting on the class" (Focus Group 5, SNA)

In addition to this, concern was raised over many students having high needs in classes who don't actually have SNA access but end up needing the SNA support:

"There are so many kids here that are needy kids even before you consider the ones that are allocated SNA's and these are the ones that are screaming for help and like I get confused!. I have to be honest about the children that, coming into the next term say, who I am actually there for, being honest with you" (Focus Group 3, SNA)

"Ye like say in a first-year class I am in, there is only 1 of the kids with an SNA and none of the rest of the kid's acceptance went through, where there was something

missing from it or not I don't know. Now we all know they need assistance but they haven't got the SNA allocation." (Focus Group 3, SNA)

Theme 3: Teacher and SNA Relationship

Another factor which was expressed as having a major influence on the role of the SNA was the relationship with the classroom teacher, with many SNAs stating that trying to build a rapport with the teachers can be critical in terms of the SNAs ability to play any role at all:

"Dealing with the teachers can be very challenging because at the end of the day it all depends on the teacher you're working with .Some teachers are all for children with special educational needs and they're very organised and they'll have special work for you and the child, others don't at all." (Focus Group 1, SNA)

"I would say that is one of the most challenging parts, liaising with the teacher"
(Focus Group 1, SNA)

Teacher not wanting SNA in Classroom

Within the theme of teacher and SNA relationships, it was very apparent that in a number of instances the class teacher would not want the SNA in the classroom and in some cases would actually ask them to leave:

I have to say and I hate saying this but I'm just going to be honest. There may be a teacher who just doesn't want an SNA in the class and there's not really much we can do about that if they say "No, we don't want you in the class"... So in this regard, it's really at the discretion of the teacher unfortunately. Even if we feel we should be in that lesson. (Focus Group 2, SNA)

This was a situation which a number of SNAs felt was unfair on the student with SEN and some SNAs stated they would dispute this with the teacher:

“Unless I’m in he will act up. In the interest of the child, that is why he’s being assigned an SNA and I think it’s selfish of the teacher to take that away from him.”
(Focus Group 2, SNA)

“We’d have an odd one like that and we’d always say “But it’s my job to be with them, I’m assigned to him”.” (Focus Group 2, SNA)

This section established three key factors which influenced the role of the SNA in mainstream education. It was stated that the role of the SNA is very much dependent on the individual needs of the student with SEN with whom they are working, this is something which was alluded to in the quantitative results also. The issue of circular roles v actual roles was one which was also referred to extensively. This seemed to be most apparent in facilitating learning by taking on roles which were seen to be of a teaching nature, which is beyond that of their job description but is obviously support required by the SEN student. In addition to this there was evidence of SNAs feeling stretched over a number of students and feeling like they were responsible for many more students than they were officially allocated to. Finally, the SNA and teacher relationship was explored as a potential influencer on the role of the SNA in mainstream schools. It was identified by numerous SNAs in this research that at times SNAs were not wanted in the classroom and that in their opinion, trying to build rapport with teachers was often a great obstacle to the SNAs fulfilling their duties.

4.3.4 SNA in PE

4.3.4.1 Roles and Responsibilities of the SNA in PE

The role of the SNA in PE was explored in depth in the focus groups and interviews and the following themes were developed from the data:

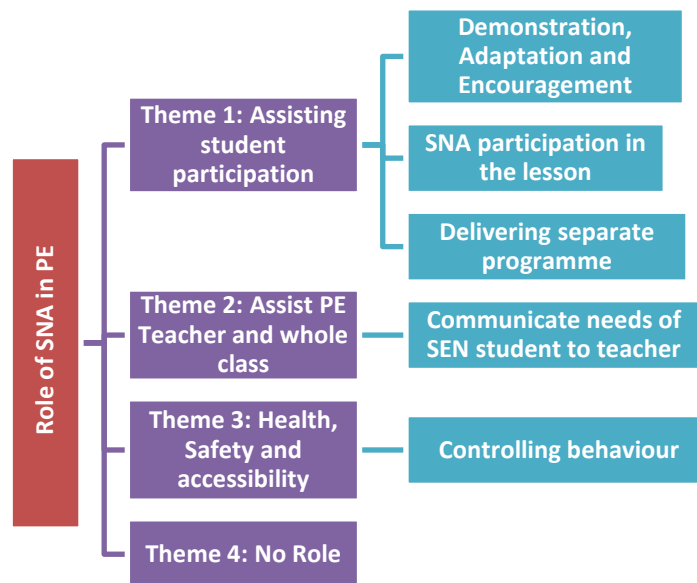


Figure 4.19. Illustration of the themes on the topic of the Role of the SNA in PE

Theme 1: Assisting student participation

Assisting student participation was one of the main roles discussed as being a major duty for the SNA during PE. The ways in which SNAs assisted student participation was manifested in many different ways which will be outlined below via subthemes.

Demonstration, Encouragement and Adaptation

SNAs stated that they would often use demonstration to assist the student in participating:

“You have to show them and then they’ll copy you and then you let them go do it themselves and then you might need to touch in and out to show them like” (Focus Group 1, SNA)

Another method used to assist student participation was encouragement:

“I think the kids would just sit on the bench and they would wander off and sit on their own... They wouldn’t get involved. In my experience anyway, it’s the encouragement side of it, “Come on you can do it”, you know they might get a bang of a ball, and that’s it, they don’t want to become involved anymore. But this is where the SNA comes in, you have to try encourage them back into it.” (Focus Group 2, SNA)

Another way you could look at it is that they might not want to go to PE at all, and in that sense your role is to encourage them! Because if they want to be included they have to try! Some schools are very strict with their PE, you have to do it and that’s it, and if they’re throwing a fit and saying I don’t want to go, it’s your role really to try and coax them in! (Focus Group 1, SNA)

“Well, the child I’m working with at the moment doesn’t want to take part at all! So, the whole time I’m trying to coax him to do something” (Interview 2, SNA)

In certain instances the SNAs also reported attempting to adapt the lessons the get the students to take part:

“Maybe to differentiate what’s going on with possibly what he might do!” (Interview 2, SNA)

“So we decided to take our own initiative to say to the PE teacher, look this isn’t working. So we took them on a lap walking around the hall, while counting, so integrating mathematics within the session.” (Focus Group 2, SNA)

SNA participation in the lesson

A number of SNAs mentioned that in order to assist the student in participating in PE, it was often necessary for the SNA themselves to take part in the class:

“Yeah, actually taking part yourself is definitely beneficial. It’s also a good motivation for them because if they see you’re taking part, have no inhibitions about getting involved then they won’t either. We even played tag rugby with them, and they then have a better respect for you as their SNA. The other children also then have a greater respect for you taking part as an adult and I think a lot of the time that is where the friendship comes in, quicker in PE than in the classroom definitely” (Focus Group 2, SNA)

Delivering a separate programme

On occasion it appeared that in order to facilitate inclusion and participation for students with SEN it was best to organize separate activities for them within the class. These, according to the participants of the focus groups, were activities often lead by the SNAs:

“We could take a smaller group and do activities like SAQ’s (Speed, Agility and Quickness Programme) and other smaller games that they don’t have to play with all the others because they are very self-conscious so a smaller group at their own level would encourage them to take part more. (Focus Group 3, SNA)

“Sometimes you can just take them aside and play what they are interested in if they don’t want to join everyone else” (Focus Group 4, SNA)

“I was working with a kid with cerebral palsy and he just wouldn’t get involved in any sports where there was a ball like football because he was afraid. But it meant I could go over and throw and catch and kick with him, so he was around the class and he was doing something, rather than sitting on the bench.” (Focus Group 2, SNA)

The notion of separate activities for students with SEN was also referred to by PE Teachers in the questionnaire comments:

“At times they prefer to have a PE class with just SEN students as they feel they can compete at their own level” (Questionnaire, PE Teacher).

Theme 2: Assist PE Teacher and whole class

Assisting the PE teacher was also frequently discussed as a major role for the SNA in PE and it seemed the SNAs felt this was valued by many PE teachers:

“I think the teachers in PE value the extra adult for the extra pair of hands as well.” (Focus Group 2, SNA)

One of the main ways SNAs stated they assisted the PE teacher was by communicating the specific needs of the students with SEN on a given day or for certain activities:

“The teachers would look to us as we’d be working with the child the most and they definitely would value our opinion.” (Focus Group 2, SNA)

“The PE teacher would nearly always come over to you and ask if they’re able to do X, Y and Z, nearly all.” (Focus Group 1, SNA)

“...so we just would always make sure the teacher was aware where that student was at, in a particular day, for example if the student was having a very frustrating day,”(Interview 3, SNA)

Many PE teachers surveyed also seemed to value the role of the SNA as a source of information on the particular needs of the students with SEN:

“Sometimes you're just put in a situation teaching a student with needs you know nothing about. The SNA is a great benefit in class especially when you have a big class 30+ in a lot of PE classes in our school.” (Questionnaire, PE Teacher)

As with in academic classes, the role of the SNA in PE appears to often stretch to assist all students in the class rather than just the student with SEN to whom they are assigned:

“I think this can happen especially in PE, where say in first year, you have a child who's not directly under SNA supervision, the PE teacher might give a nod to say well will you keep an eye on someone else while you're here.”(Focus Group 2, SNA)

“because it's PE you would a lot of the time end up looking after a group of children, trying to work with them as well as the child you're assigned to.”(Interview 2, SNA)

Theme 3: Health, Safety and Physical Assistance

Health and safety appeared to be a key role and an important responsibility for the SNAs in PE:

“Well obviously there's a health and safety aspect with some of the children, you know, they have to be safe at all times, depending on their needs, but I feel the main aspect of our role in PE is we must ensure safety at all times.”(Interview 1, SNA)

“Yes, I also worked with a child who had scoliosis and she ended up stopping taking part in PE! The teacher used to say that she could do everything, that she’d be able to take part the same way everyone else was, one day we were doing dancing and the SNA was in the room but standing on the side because the teacher had emphasized that she was fine, and she fell!..... So that goes back to the SNA, although sometimes they don’t need you, we have to be in that room. Now what we can do when you’re in the room is neither here nor there, but it’s the fact you’re there.” (Focus Group 1, SNA)

Managing Behaviour

Within the concerns for Health and Safety, monitoring and managing behavior seemed to be of importance not just for the student with SEN but also to assist the PE teacher:

“One or two of the kids with Asperger’s would lose their temper quite quickly, and if you’re not there to deal with that it’s unfair, as you know, the teacher has a whole class full and it’s quite difficult, so your role in that regard is usually to calm them down”(Focus Group 2, SNA)

And further more to facilitate an enjoyable class for all the students:

“because you’re staying out and keeping those students quite it does give the other students an opportunity to play and gives them a chance...because if there kicking off, they’re not getting to do anything with their time.” (Focus Group 5, SNA)

Physical Assistance

An additional role which was carried out under this theme was that of physical assistance to allow participation in PE. Sometimes this took the form of preparing students before and after the PE class:

“The only time we might help out is at the end when he’s changing his clothes,but sometimes the trousers might be twisted or the collar might not be out on his shirt, which makes it difficult for him. He has zars syndrome so he has short arms, so he finds it very difficult a lot of the time to fix his clothes... We might fix up his clothes after PE so. He’s very independent in other ways though.” (Interview 3, SNA)

And at other times, the SNA was responsible for physical assisting the students with SEN to ensure they could access the class:

“I worked with a child, who had spinal- bifadahe had a calliper/ brace on his legHe wouldn’t have been able to access PE without me.” (Focus Group 2, SNA)

Theme 4: No Role

In many circumstances it was mentioned that the SNA played “No Role” in PE and in these scenarios it was stated that they were happier to allow the student have independence during the PE class

“PE is the one class that you can actually let the child go and step back. Of all the classes they attend, it’s really important that you can let them go!” (Focus Group 1, SNA)

“We’re not involved, no, we try to promote their independence as much as possible and we want them to be included with their peers as much as possible, so you don’t become part of you know, the team or anything!”(Interview 3, SNA)

It was also stated that many of the students wouldn’t need the SNAs help during the PE class, depending on the individual needs of the students

“He didn’t need an SNA during PE. He only needed the SNA support within the classroom so he didn’t have an SNA during that time.” (Focus Group 2, SNA)

"It does fully depend on the child, there may be no support needed in PE."

(Focus Group 1, SNA)

It was also noted that in some cases the student would not want the SNA in the PE class:

"Now, my lad wouldn't like me there! I know if I was in PE with him, he'd be very put out!"(Focus Group 1, SNA)

"She's actually quite happy to be in the PE class alone. She would feel almost slightly uncomfortable if I was there, not actually physically involved!" (Focus Group 1, SNA)

In synopsis, this section identified four key themes which outline the role of the SNA in PE. The first role discussed was "Assisting student participation". This role encompassed the SNA demonstrating and adapting activities in PE, participating in PE themselves to encourage the students with SEN to take part and delivering a separate activity programme for the students with SEN during the PE class. As was outlined during the section on the SNA in mainstream education, one of the main roles of the SNA in PE was also identified as assisting the class teacher and all the students in the class who needed help. Another important role which SNAs engaged in was ensuring the health, safety and physical assistance needs of the students with SEN. Finally the notion of SNAs playing "no role" in PE was presented and outlined. It was stated that this largely occurred in cases where the student with SEN did not want or need assistance in PE class and as such it was deemed important to allow the student to develop independence during this class without the SNA. Factors which were seen to be important in influencing the role of the SNA in PE will be outlined in the next section.

4.3.4.2 Factors influencing the role of the SNA in PE

As detailed above, the role of the SNA is quite varied. During the focus groups and interviews some attention was also given to possible factors which may influence the role of the SNA in PE. The main themes to emerge are illustrated below:

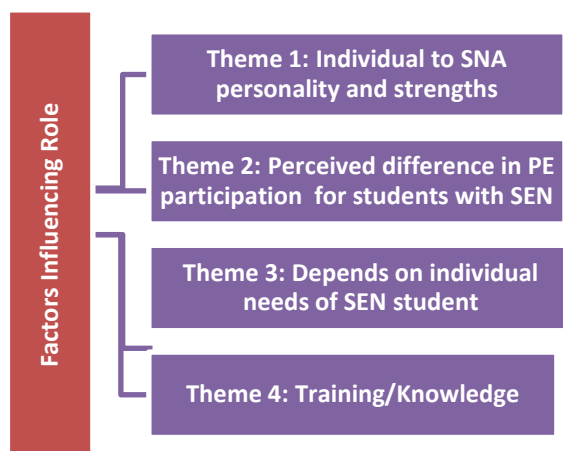


Figure 4.20. Figure illustrating factors which influence the role of the SNA in PE

Theme 1: Individual to SNA Personality and Strengths

It was mentioned that the role being played by the SNA in PE could often be determined by the individual personality of the SNA themselves and their level of interest in PE/Sport and or ability to be physically involved:

“I don’t know if all SNA’s would like to be involved in PE class you see. Maybe some SNA’s may not be physically able to do it, and then they can have a choice and do something within their strengths instead.” (Interview 6, SNA)

It was suggested that this should be taken into consideration when planning for SNAs to work with students in PE and in some cases it was explained that the school does take this into account and plan around it:

“We usually have a meeting at the beginning of the term to determine what areas you are particularly interested in so you can be identified then as being more involved in that subject. So like there are some SNA’s who are really into PE and sport so they would be put down to be involved in that whereas other SNA’s would be more involved in woodwork or HE.” (Focus Group 3, SNA)

Theme 2: Perceived difference in PE participation for students with SEN

An issue was also raised in relation to SNAs taking students out of the main PE activity to do a separate one and then students feeling there was unfair favouritism towards the students with SEN:

“If the PE Teacher is running a programme for his class, and we’ll go there with Conor (student with SEN) or whoever else, the rest of the kids want to do what you’re doing and will say ‘Well they’re doing that, why can’t I do that’ and no one would take part in anything in the class...” (Focus Group 5, SNA)

Another SNA stated that this issue was something which needed to be explained to students without SEN; that they need to understand that some students need to take part in different activities to them:

“I think the other students have to learn that if he can’t do it he can try to do something else. He shouldn’t sit there for eight minutes doing nothing.” (Focus Group 5, SNA)

Theme 3: Individual needs of SEN students

As mentioned previously, the single biggest influencing factor on the role of the SNA in PE was the specific and individual needs of the students. This was summarised by giving an example of the range of needs one SNA could be working with and how this would impact the role they play in PE:

“I worked with a child, the first child I actually worked with, who had spina bifida and had hydrocephalies and he had a caliper/ brace on his leg and he initially also had a helmet on his head. He wouldn’t have been able to access PE without me. But then, on the other hand, I have another boy this year in 1st year who has Asperger’s who has started who doesn’t need me there. However, I still go over just in case he has temper problems and because I enjoy seeing him play, but he really doesn’t need me.” (Focus Group 2, SNA)

The influence of individual needs of students on the role of SNAs in PE was also very evident from the comments sections of the questionnaires, for example:

“It depends on the child. Some children that have no physical difficulties do not want their SNA in PE with them.” (Questionnaire, SNA)

“Their role is dependent on the individual needs of the students” (Questionnaire, PE Teacher)

Theme 4: Training and Knowledge

Training in the area of inclusion and health and safety was also a topic which came up in relation to allowing SNAs to play more of an active role in PE;

“I also think the training programme (in inclusion in PE) would be beneficial as there’s always more to learn, you would feel refreshed. You do have so many different individuals coming along and you often feel, God had I done that differently it might have worked out better, etc.”(Focus Group 2, SNA)

“It’s a health and safety thing to yourself as well, like learning how to lift, hoist, etc. I know St. Michael’s House teach you how to do that but we’ve never had any specific training within that arena.” (Focus Group 2, SNA)

“Like that, I had a child who was visually impaired last year and I had never worked with a child with impaired vision before so that was very daunting. I didn’t know

how best to adapt the session, so a bit of guidance on that would have been good.”
(Focus Group 2, SNA)

“SNA’s would love any type of course. Any training course is helpful, because we’re just doing things as we go. It’s off the cuff really! We’re just winging it a lot of the time!” (Focus Group 1, SNA)

The key factors which were believed to have an influence on the role of the SNA in PE were outlined in this section. Namely they included the individual strengths and personality of each SNA, the perceived difference in PE participation for students with SEN, the individual needs of students with SEN and the training needs of SNAs in inclusion in PE. These are all factors which would need to be carefully considered in conceptualising a more active role for SNAs in PE.

Chapter 5

Discussion

5.1 Introduction

The aim of this research was to explore the roles and responsibilities of the SNA in mainstream post primary PE, in relation to the inclusion of students with SEN. To achieve this research aim, five research questions were identified and used to guide the data collection and analysis within this research. This chapter will discuss the findings of this research relative to the research questions, using the same headings and themes used in the results chapter.

5.2 Discussion of Findings

RQ 1: What is the profile of PE Teachers and SNAs teaching in mainstream post primary schools and what is the inclusion profile of these schools?

PE Teachers and SNA Profile

Personal demographic data collected on the SNA and PE teacher will be presented and discussed below including Gender, age, years' experience and experience teaching students with SEN. Inferential statistics were used in this study to explore whether any statistically significant relationships existed between these factors and inclusion in PE or the role of the SNA in PE. The impact of these findings will be discussed and comparisons will be made with relevant literature which has also explored such relationships.

Gender

The PE teachers who participated in the questionnaire comprised of 44% Males and 56% Females in comparison to the SNA sample containing just 7% of Males and 93% Females, which resulted in a significant difference in gender breakdown between the two participants groups ($p < .001$).

The relationship between gender and perceptions of inclusion of students with SEN in PE was explored in this research using Pearson Chi Squared, with results showing no significant relationship. The test did not specifically explore attitudes towards inclusion however but rather focused on the perceived levels of current inclusion in PE for students with SEN.

Multiple researchers have explored the relationships between gender and attitudes of PE teachers towards inclusion, with many finding that female teachers have a more positive attitude towards the inclusion of students with SEN than male teachers (Meegan and MacPhail 2006b; Boyle, Topping and Jindal-Snape 2013; Avramidis et al. 2000; Burge et al. 2000; Opdal, Wormæs, and Habayeb 2001; Alghazo and Naggar Gaad 2004). On the contrary, a similar number of researchers found that gender differences had no significant impact on attitudes to inclusion (Avramidis and Norwich 2002; Van Reusen et al. 2001; Al-Zyoudi's 2006; Loreman et al. 2007).

With more females taking part in this research in general, but specifically within the SNA sample, it is plausible that a more positive attitude to inclusion would exist within this research but without having performed specific testing to examine attitudes to inclusion this suggestion is merely speculative.

The relationship between gender and perceptions of the role of the SNA in PE was also explored using Person Chi-squared. The results of this analysis indicated that SNAs who were male in this research were significantly more likely to fulfill the role of "Assist PE teachers in teaching PE class" than SNAs who were female ($p < .01$). Furthermore PE teachers who were male were significantly more likely to want SNAs to fulfil the role "Advise the PE teacher on suitable activities for the student with SEN" ($p < .05$).

These findings present very interesting and novel insight towards the impact of gender on the role of the SNA in PE.

The finding relating to male SNAs being more likely to “Assist PE teachers in teaching PE class” could be linked with the finding in the qualitative data stating that the role of the SNA is influenced by personal characteristics of the SNA, such as whether they are “sporty”. In considering the suggestions in the literature that more males participate in sport and physical activity than females (Irish Sports Monitor, 2017), perhaps it could be hypothesized that the reason male SNAs were more likely to play this active role in PE was due to the fact they had more experience of participation in sport. This type of experience and knowledge would potentially provide SNAs with the increased confidence to play such an active role in PE.

Additionally, the finding that male PE teachers were more likely to want SNAs to “*Advise the PE teacher on suitable activities for the student with SEN*” could potentially be linked with suggestions in the literature that female teachers have more positive attitudes towards inclusion of students with SEN (Meegan and MacPhail 2006; Boyle, Topping and Jindal-Snape 2013; Avramidis et al. 2000; Burge et al. 2000; Opdal, Wormæs, and Habayeb 2001; Alghazo and Naggar Gaad 2004). Perhaps in this regard, it could be conceptualised that a greater majority of male PE teachers may not feel confident or comfortable including students with SEN in comparison to female PE teachers, therefore leading them to seek additional support from the SNA in relation to advice on inclusion specific to the needs of the students with SEN.

It is important to state of course that these are merely speculative observations and are hypotheses which were not tested in this research. However, given the significance of the findings relating to gender and the role of the SNA, it is certainly worthwhile exploring underlining causes for such disparities, while also considering these possible influences within any future recommendations and training on the topic of the SNA in PE.

Age and years of experience

In this research study, PE teacher participants were found to be significantly younger ($p < .001$) than SNA participants (PE, $M = 36.76$; SNAs, $M = 46.37$) but PE teachers had significantly more years ($p < .001$) of working experience (PE, $M = 10.45$; SNAs, $M = 7.89$).

Interestingly, existing literature has suggested that younger teachers and those with fewer years of experience have been found to be more supportive to inclusion (Rizzo and Vispoel 1991; Forlins 1995; Glaubman and Lifshitz 2001; Alghazo and Naggar Gaad 2004). Glaubman and Lifshitz (2001) for example illustrated that teachers with one to five years of teaching experience were significantly more likely to have positive attitudes towards the inclusion of students with special needs in comparison to teachers with 6–11 years' experience and those with 12 or more years of experience.

While attitudes towards inclusion were not specifically measured in this research, no statistically significant relationship was found between the age or years of experience of SNAs or PE teachers and their perceptions of the importance of PE for students with SEN, the inclusion of students with SEN in PE or the enjoyment levels of students with SEN in PE.

A statistically significant relationship was found however, between the years of teaching experience of PE teachers and their perceived importance of the role of the SNA in PE, with PE teachers who had more years teaching experience being more likely to perceive the SNAs role in PE to be of greater importance than PE teachers who had less years of teaching experience.

Furthermore, a statistically significant relationship was found between PE teachers' age and the roles they would like SNAs to fulfill in PE, with PE teachers who were older being more likely to select that they would like SNAs to fulfill the role "Assist students in participating in class" than PE teachers who were younger.

Essentially the results indicate that PE teachers who are older and have more years teaching experience want the SNAs to play more of an active role in PE. Both of these findings are very interesting in relation to the role of the SNA in PE and present novel insights into potential factors which could be influencing the roles of SNAs and PE and what the possible rationales for such influences might be. Findings in the literature outlined above (Rizzo and Vispoel 1991; Forlins 1995; Glaubman and Lifshitz 2001; Alghazo and Naggat Gaad 2004), suggest that teachers with fewer years of teaching experience have more positive attitudes towards the inclusion of students with SEN in PE. With this in mind, perhaps it can be theorized that the reason older and more experienced teachers perceived the role of the SNA in PE to be of more importance was due to the fact that they themselves did not feel comfortable or confident in including students with SEN. If this theory was to be accurate, caution would need to be exercised to ensure that the role of the SNA in PE would not be deemed to replace the PE teachers' efforts to include students with SEN in PE, such as was evident in research by McCubbin and Van (2013). On the other hand, perhaps the observed relationship between years of experience/age and the importance of the role of the SNA in this research is simply reflective of the PE teachers having had time to appreciate and value the assistance of the SNA in their PE class through positive experiences throughout the years.

Regardless of the underlying cause of the relationship between age/years of experience and the role of SNA in PE, it is again a potentially influential factor which should be considered and explored further.

Experience teaching students with SEN

Of the PE teachers who completed the questionnaire, 98% had experience teaching students with SEN. The consequences of this are interesting in that

research has highlighted that hands on experience working with students with SEN is one of the greatest factors for increasing confidence in teaching ability and thus increases positive attitudes towards inclusion (Avramidis, Bayliss, and Burden 2000; Hodge and Jansma 2000; Sharma et al. 2006). Intriguingly though, this is somewhat conflicting with the insinuation above that years teaching experience leads to more negative attitudes towards inclusion. Perhaps therefore it is worthwhile considering that in the past decade the shift towards inclusion has resulted in all teachers gaining more experience with working with students with SEN, and thus, with years of experience working as a teacher there are inevitable years of experience of inclusion also. This potentially could explain the significant relationship outlined above in relation to years of experience and the role of the SNA also, in that those with more teaching experience had more experience of working with SNAs which allowed them to appreciate the importance of the work they do.

In conclusion, it would appear from the literature that the characteristics of teachers and professionals working with students with SEN, which would result in the most positive attitudes towards inclusion, are young females with experience teaching students with SEN. The sample population in the questionnaire aspect of this research are predominantly female and with experience teaching students with SEN which potentially will influence the findings of the research giving it a more positive focus on inclusion. However the average age and years' experience have the capability to produce findings which may be of a more negative predisposition towards inclusion. The inferential statistics conducted did not suggest any relationship between age/years of experience/gender and inclusion but there were a number of significant relationships identified between these personal characteristics of SNAs and PE teachers and the role of the SNA in PE. This provides for the development of interesting hypotheses, but more importantly begins to provide novel insights into the influential factors impacting on the role of the SNA in PE.

Inclusion profile of schools

Prevalence of special educational needs in post primary schools

PE Teachers in this research identified an average of 10% of the student population in their schools as having SEN, similarly SNAs identified 9% of students as having SEN.

In Ireland, data on SEN and disability is collected by a number of agencies; however, depending on the definition of SEN or disability used, determining the exact numbers of students with SEN in Ireland can be difficult (NCSE 2011). The Census of Population in 2016 (CSO 2016) for example found that 6.2% of the population aged 0-18 years had a disability, where the eligibility criteria for having a disability was defined as “having at least one long-lasting condition”. The finding from the census 2016 is slightly lower than the 9% and 10% reported in this research.

This research, however, is looking specifically at SEN rather than disability. The most relevant statistic therefore comes from the NCSE 2006 report, which undertook one of the first attempts to estimate the cohort of the population with SEN. The eligibility criteria which the report used to carry out the estimate was based on the EPSEN Act’s broader definition of SEN:

‘a restriction in the capacity of a person to participate in and benefit from education on account of an enduring physical, sensory, mental health or learning disability, or any other condition which results in a person learning differently from a person without that condition’.

(EPSEN Act, Government of Ireland, 2004, p6)

In taking this broader definition the report found the prevalence of SEN to be 17.7 percent (NCSE 2006), which is higher than the finding for this current research. In 2011 the NCSE again attempted to report on the prevalence of SEN using the

Growing up in Ireland data and found that 25% had some form of SEN. What is noteworthy within this statistic is that the figure presented cumulates both parent and teacher reported SEN, but when just looking at the teacher responses alone the estimate was 14.1%, which is more comparable to the figure reported by Teachers and SNAs in this research.

Therefore it is reasonable to conclude that the population of students reported in this current research study is slightly higher than statistics which estimated the percentage of 0-18 year olds with a disability and considerably lower than research which has estimated the percentage of 0-18 year olds with SEN. The reason for the lower percentage of SEN reported in this current study can be explained by the fact that it is only reporting students with SEN in mainstream post primary schools not special schools or primary schools.

Prevalence of Special Educational Needs Type

Both SNAs and PE Teachers in this research reported a somewhat similar prevalence in the most common types of SEN of the students with whom they worked, as can be seen in figure 4.2 of the results chapter. Autism, EBD⁴/ADHD⁵, dyspraxia and learning disabilities were reported by both SNAs and PE Teachers as being within the top 4 types of SEN of students with whom they worked. These results are similar to those reported by Kerins and McDonagh (2015) who indicated that the majority of SNAs were supporting students with autism (60.5%), followed by EBD/Severe EBD (44.5%) and specific learning disabilities (SLD) (42%). Likewise the NCSE (2010) reported students with EBD represented the highest number of students supported by SNAs, followed by students in the category of autism. Additionally, Spens (2013) reported that the main category of SEN to whom SNAs are allocated was EBD, at 51%.

The SEN types reported in this current research are also reflective of statistics which illustrate the most prevalent types of SEN of students in mainstream post

⁴ Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties

⁵ Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder

primary school, who do not receive SNA support. Such statistics were reported by the NCSE in 2011 indicating that the top 4 SEN types in mainstream post primary schools were learning disabilities (Borderline mild general learning disability 21%, mild general learning disability 21%, specific learning disability 20%), EBD (12%), Physical Disabilities (8%) and Autism (6%), which is similar to the ranking of SEN types in this research study other than that of physical disabilities.

Pearson Chi Squared analysis indicated that there were significant differences in the reporting of the SEN types of students by SNAs and PE teachers in this research; with PE teachers' reporting higher frequencies of all of the SEN types than SNAs. This difference could be explained due to SNAs more precisely selecting the SEN types of students that they worked directly with, as opposed to the types of SEN of students who attended the school. Whereas, PE Teachers were selecting the types of SEN of students who attended their PE class, which would result in them selecting a greater range of types of SEN. An additional hypothesis for this discrepancy could be the greater knowledge which SNAs would have of SEN types, leading to them being more precise with their selection than PE teachers who may not have been aware of which types of SEN the students in their class were presenting with.

Overall, based on existing research as outlined above (Spens 2013; Kerins and McDonagh 2015; NCSE 2010), it can be concluded that the SEN profile reported within this study is a good representation of the SEN profile of students who receive SNA support in the majority of schools in Ireland and also of the overall profile of students with SEN in mainstream post primary schools in Ireland.

Many significant relationships were discovered within this research between the type of SEN of students that SNAs worked with and the roles which were fulfilled by SNAs in general education and in PE. Such a finding illustrates the multifaceted nature of the role of the SNA with regards to the fact that their role is dependent on many influential factors, one of which is the type of SEN of the students. The concept of individual difference and individual needs is a theme which was evident

throughout all aspects of the research findings in this study and this finding relating to the relationship of SEN types and roles played adds strength to that theme.

The specific results regarding SEN type of students and role of SNA will be discussed with other relevant findings for research question 3 and 4 below.

Student to Special Needs Assistants Ratio

SNAs in this research reported that the average student to SNA ratio was 5:1. This is more than double the reported ratio for mainstream classes by the DES (2016), which has stated there was an average of 1.7:1, students to SNAs in 2011/12. This increased to 2.2:1 in 2015/16. PE Teachers in this research reported an average of 4.34 SNAs working in their schools, while SNAs reported a similar figure of 4.82 SNAs working in their schools. Interestingly, an estimated a ratio of students with SEN to SNAs, using the reported average number of students with SEN in schools in this research, with the reported average number of SNAs working in the schools, results in a ratio of students with SEN to SNAs of 14:1 as reported by PE Teachers and 10:1 as reported by SNAs. This is 5-7 times higher than the reported ratios by the DES (2016).

Whilst this is not an accurate reflection of the number of students with SEN with whom SNAs are employed to work directly with, due to the fact that not all students with SEN get SNA access, it does provide interesting insight into the potential strain SNAs are being placed under in trying to accommodate all of the students with SEN in classrooms. It is important to state however, that the comprehensive review of the SNA scheme which was published recently (NCSE 2018) and the proposed new model of allocation recommended based on the review, which includes frontloading of SNAs (now to be called inclusion support assistants), has the potential to improve the SNA to students with SEN ratio. These are issues which will be discussed in more detail in the below section “Role of the SNA” but it

is worthwhile highlighting at this stage in relation to the presentation of SEN population statistics and SNA employment statistics.

Inclusion Practices

Negative attitudes towards students with SEN

In relation to inclusion practices in schools, this research revealed that there appeared to be a failure of staff to recognize and accept the needs of students with SEN, in particular those with behavioral needs, often doubting whether it is a “real” disability and treating students with SEN differently based on the visibility of the disability, i.e. physical needs versus behavioral needs.

While the questionnaire used in this research did not specifically measure attitudes towards inclusion or attitudes towards disability, it did examine whether any relationship existed between SEN types of students and the SNAs and PE teachers’ perceived levels of inclusion of students in PE. There was a statistically significant finding for the perceptions of inclusion in and enjoyment of PE with SNAs who worked with students with sensory disabilities ($p < .05$) but no relationship was found with any other type of SEN. Perhaps it could be speculated that this finding supports the theme emerging from the qualitative data, that the more “visible” disabilities receive preferred inclusion treatment, in that a sensory disability such as visual impairment would be something which would be overtly obvious to PE teachers. However, the lack of a finding relating to any other SEN type and inclusion in PE makes this conclusion speculative. .

The notion that sensory disabilities would receive a more positive attitude however, is one which has been reflected in similar research into inclusion whereby researchers found that teachers have a more positive attitude to the inclusion of students with physical or sensory disabilities and less so for students with EBD (Farrell 2000; Lindsay 2007; Winter and O’Raw 2010, Avramidis, Bayliss and

Burden 2000; Meegan and MacPhail 2006b; Avramidis and Norwich 2002; Scanlon and Barnes-Holmes, 2013).

This literature and the findings from the qualitative data in this research, has particular implications when you consider the finding in this research that EBD were amongst the most prevalent types of SEN reported to be attending schools of the research participants.

Reasons exploring why such negative attitudes may exist towards students with behavioral needs include Scanlon and Barnes-Holmes (2013) identifying that there was a lack of specific training and support available and provided for teachers to effectively teach students with such needs and to proactively manage such behaviors. In turn, it was found that this reduced potential opportunities for positive interactions and increased possibilities for negative interactions between students and teachers, which further exacerbated the negative emotions of teachers. One of the findings from their study also emphasized that teachers lacked knowledge surrounding emotional and behavioural disorders, meaning they were not aware of the specific behavioural and cognitive characteristics of students with EBD, how these affected their behaviour or how they impacted on their potential to learn.

According to Folsom-Meek and Rizzo (2002), attitude plays a significant role in explaining how teachers engage and facilitate students with disabilities in their PE classes. Therefore, this finding has significant repercussions in the context of this research and it should be considered in relation to all additional findings which have emerged throughout this study. For example, one needs to contemplate whether this attitude is affecting teacher's willingness to include some students with SEN into PE. Additionally, perhaps there is a question over whether PE teachers desire to have the SNA play more of a role in PE, particularly in relation to the implementation of separate group activities, is to relieve PE teachers from having to incorporate students with such types of SEN into their PE class.

Moreover, research has identified that teachers have expressed concern that including students with EBD will have a detrimental effect on the educational attainment of other students with SEN in the class (Diamond 1994: Heflin and Bullock 1999), which adds to the possibility that the use of SNAs as alluded to above could be implemented somewhat unfairly in relation to this cohort of students.

Whilst this insinuation was not explored within this research, the potential implications of the findings above are worthy of cautious consideration in this area. Additionally, the findings from Scanlon and Barnes-Holmes (2013) alluding to a lack of knowledge and training as being a predominant influencing factor for such negative attitudes is one which has relevance to the training needs expressed by PE teachers and SNAs in this research which will be discussed later.

IEP's

It appeared to be a common opinion amongst the SNAs who took part in this research that IEPs were not regularly completed for students in second level, despite the fact that policy recommendations state that they should be completed for all students with SEN. Findings from the Project Iris Research Report (2015) somewhat reflected this finding stating that just over half of the post primary respondents (53%) , which included principals, resource teachers and SEN co-ordinators said only some students had IEPs, mainly those allocated resource hours and from low incidence categories of SEN. In addition, 21% of respondents stated that students with SEN did not have any IEPs in their schools (Rose et al. 2010).

SNAs in this research stated that while IEPs were not always common practice, there was often mention of “care plans” and other types of plans for students which were not as official as IEP's. This outcome was reflected by project IRIS which found that upon visits to their case study schools, there was often some form of IEP in place but they “varied in format and content and how they were deployed” (Rose et al. 2010, p. 76).

In relation to the involvement of the SNA in IEP development, this research found that 46% of SNAs did have an input into the planning of IEPs for the students with SEN with whom they worked. Research by Keating and O'Connor (2012) to some extent correlated with these findings when they reported that 27% of SNAs were "somewhat" involved in the IEP process and a higher number (44%) "sometimes" provided input into the evaluation of learning outcomes. Findings from Project Iris however, did not support this finding, stating that in general SNAs played no role in IEP planning in post primary schools despite being involved in delivering teaching programmes. Rather there was a preference (from 76% of respondents) for using specialists such as learning support or resource teachers to assist in developing IEPs (Rose, Shevlin, Winter and O'Raw 2010).

In relation to IEPs for PE specifically, it appeared these were not completed in the schools in which the participants of this research worked, with participants commenting that "we don't have any" or that the plans for PE are a "work in progress" (SNA/PE teacher, questionnaire). Smith and Green (2004) reported that in England, PE teachers are critical of the extent to which they find statements of SEN (English equivalent of IEPs), a useful resource for PE, due to the fact that they relate more to subjects such as English, Mathematics and Science. Somewhat conversely, research by Maher (2013) stated that 75% of SENCOs and 76% of LSAs who took part in a web based survey, reported that they felt Statements of SEN are appropriate to a PE context, and did not see the need to differentiate between classroom-based subjects and more physically orientated subjects such as PE. In the same research however, LSAs and SENCOs reported through comments on the survey that a lot of the time such Statements of SEN did not contain PE specific guidelines such as "how barriers in PE can be removed" (Maher 2013, p. 132). Other participants in the same research argued that the information provided in Statements of SEN contained detail of the strengths and weaknesses of the students with SEN and therefore PE teachers should be able to interpret this information and apply it to activities in PE. Therefore it seems that the findings within this research are similar to that of Maher (2013) in that IEPs do not contain PE specific objectives or targets for students with SEN, but it could be

argued that this should not stop PE teachers from using the IEPs, which are available for students with SEN, to ensure that activities in their class will be suitable for all students.

With findings within this research, and existing literature (Morley et al. 2005; Smith and Green 2004; Vickerman 2002, 2007), stating PE teachers feel unable to facilitate the inclusion of some students with in PE because of a lack of information and support, it would appear that the use of IEPs in the way outlined above would be of use to PE teachers. Additionally, with findings of this research outlining a key role desired by PE teachers for SNAs in PE would be to share students SEN specific information with them, it seems the use of the IEP document could form an easy way for this sharing of information to occur.

A further point worthwhile considering is that SEN is a contextual concept, insofar as a student may have a special educational need in PE but would not necessarily have a special educational need in a classroom-based subject (DfES 2001). For example, a student who uses a wheelchair for mobility may not have a special educational need in a Mathematics lesson, but may require additional provision in a PE context (Maher 2013). With the predominant type of SEN of students reported in this research being of a learning, behavioral and development nature, perhaps the information on IEPs is even more difficult to translate to a physical subject like PE given that there is possibly no mention of the students strengths and weaknesses in a physical capacity. Of course, we know that barriers to PE are not merely based on physical capabilities, however it is worth considering that a PE teacher may not know how to adapt activities for the strengths and weaknesses which would be identified for students with social, emotional and cognitive needs as opposed to obvious physical ones. This is a concern which ultimately would need to be addressed in training to provide PE teachers with such adaptation techniques and a clear understanding of some of the characteristics associated with various types of SEN.

RQ 2: What are the key factors which promote and hinder the inclusion of students with SEN in PE?

The results of this research study concluded that just over half of the PE Teachers and SNAs (56% and 59% respectively) felt that students with SEN were fully included in PE class. Interestingly however, 97% of PE Teachers and 93% of SNAs stated that they felt students with SEN enjoyed the PE class, a finding which leaves some ambiguity in relation to the inclusion of students with SEN in PE as one would assume that to enjoy PE class the students would need to be included in it. Interestingly such a finding is not unique to this research. Meegan (2010) for example explored the inclusion in PE of a student with a physical disability through ethnography and found that the student took little active part in the majority of the PE classes but yet he stated that PE was his favourite subject and that he loved it, along with the PE teacher stating the student really enjoyed PE. Examples such as this, which give an insight from the students perspective are of great value as they challenge what we may conceptualise to be important about inclusion in PE. This particular research did not explore this element from the perspective of the student but findings from the PE teachers and SNAs equally indicate some thought-provoking factors which may influence the inclusion experience of students with SEN in PE.

The next sections will explore the factors reported in this research to hinder and promote inclusion in PE which will help to explain possible reasons for the finding above.

Factors which hinder inclusion in PE

Curriculum, Class Plan and Communication of Plan

Curriculum

Many SNAs in this research referred to the need for PE teachers to implement the PE curriculum but stated that a number of the activities which are conducted as part of the “plan” (PE Curriculum) often did not suit the students with SEN, with team games such as “Basketball” and “soccer” being frequently mentioned as being a difficulty. This finding is well supported in the literature with researchers reporting that inclusion issues can become more evident in PE where team games and competitive sports take priority in the class (Maher 2017; Green 2008), and have been reported as being more difficult to plan and teach inclusively (Maher 2017; Fitzgerald 2005; Smith 2004). Previous research by Maher (2010b) and Waddington (2000) has attempted to explain why it is more difficult to include students with SEN in team games as opposed to individual activities. For example, during participation in individual activities, students are able to determine the duration and intensity of the activity without being inhibited by anyone else’s actions. During team sports however, this is not the case, and the complexity of having to initiate actions and react to the moves of other students during team activities, leads to a diminished level of control over the exertion and participation levels of the students with SEN. As a consequence of this complex interaction of multiple players in team sports, it has also been found that PE teachers find it more difficult to apply modifications for the students with SEN in team sports as they cannot restrict the actions of the other students taking part (Maher 2017; Morley et al. 2005; Smith 2004). Taking these factors into account alongside the results of this current research with 78% of PE teachers stating that they did not deliver all strands of the PE curriculum equally and 71% reporting that the “Games” strand was the one they most frequently delivered, it is perhaps not surprising that just over half the PE Teachers and SNAs felt that students with SEN were fully included in PE. Likewise, it is not surprising that the issue of the “curriculum” and type of activities being implemented in PE was raised as a factor which hindered

the inclusion of students with SEN by SNAs. What is possible to conclude from this however is that perhaps it is not so much the need of PE teachers to strictly implement each strand of curriculum which is hindering inclusion, as was perceived by SNAs, but rather the PE Teachers over reliance on implementing the “Games” strand in PE which is causing difficulties for inclusion.

Whilst it is beyond the scope of this particular research to further explore this theory, it is an area of focus which is perhaps worthy of investigation in relation to the inclusion of students with SEN in PE in Ireland. In line with the current focus of this research, the role which the SNA plays in attempting to ensure the inclusion of students with SEN will be expanded in the sections which will follow namely “Individual needs and challenges of SEN” and “Separate group activities for students with SEN”.

Class Plan and Communication of plan

SNAs in this research referred to the need to know in advance what the PE class was going to comprise of, so that they could prepare themselves and their student. This however did not seem to happen most of the time and as a result sometimes caused a challenge to the inclusion of the students with SEN along with the ability of the SNA to assist them. Research conducted on the support provided for students with SEN by Teaching Assistants (TAs) in England (Webster et al. 2010) described a comparable issue in relation to a lack of communication of class plans stating that TAs often felt under-prepared for the tasks occurring in class. This was predominately put down to a lack of time being allocated to discuss plans with teachers prior to lessons, and has been reported elsewhere (Bedford et al. 2009; Gibson, Paatsch and Toe 2016) .This finding is crucial in relation to the role of the SNA in PE and will be discussed in more detail within the section “SNA in PE”, under the topic of collaboration and shared lesson plans.

Individual needs and challenges of SEN

A recurring factor which was reported in this research as hindering inclusion in PE was the individual needs and challenges specific to students with SEN. The predominant challenges which appeared to be associated with SEN, as identified by SNAs and PE Teachers, included; fear, lower fitness/ability and motivation. This finding is reflected in research conducted by Maher (2017, p265-266) in which Learning Support Assistants (LSAs) suggested that many students with SEN are “often unable to keep up with other children” and find it “difficult to participate with and against students without SEN’s because of ostensibly inferior physical and cognitive capabilities”. It is worth considering that this view of emphasizing reasons why students cannot be included as being attributed predominately to the students perceived limitations, rather than the limitations of activities being planned to suit all abilities, is one which is strongly underpinned by the outdated medical model of disability. This type of attitude is founded by an individual ideology (Finkelstein 2001) and is an attitude which has been identified by other researchers in general education (Sissel and Sheard 2001), and more specifically in PE, where students with SEN are expected to “fit in to established arrangements, some of which are not inclusive” (Maher 2017, p. 266).

Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that some students with SEN will have greater difficulty taking part in some activities in PE. Perhaps the suggestion by SNAs and PE Teachers in this research that this is a factor which hinders inclusion is one which comes from a place of uncertainty in relation to what the specific needs of individual students are and indeed how to adapt the PE lesson to ensure all needs are catered for. This suggestion that many PE Teachers do not have the knowledge, skills or confidence to plan and deliver inclusive lessons has also been highlighted by previous research (Morley, Bailey, Tan and Cooke 2005; Smith and Green 2004; Vickerman 2002, 2007) An additional finding in this research corresponds to this suggestion with 59% of PE teachers surveyed stating that “information regarding the needs of the student with SEN” was the most important factor in ensuring the inclusion of students with SEN in PE. This finding is also

echoed in other research on inclusion in PE, with Maher (2017) reporting that SEN co-ordinators stressed the importance of the PE teacher using information relevant to the students with SEN in their PE class, such as healthcare plans and other subject specific information, to shape an inclusive PE environment. In contrast to this however, research by Maher (2013) suggested that statements of SEN did not necessarily help PE teachers and LSAs to plan and deliver differentiated lessons, but did allude to the fact that if these statements included PE-specific learning targets, they would likely be very useful for monitoring and evaluating progress of students with SEN in PE.

As identified above, “motivation” was a challenge associated with SEN which was reported by SNAs and PE Teachers in this research. According to PE teachers and SNAs this lack of motivation expressed by many students with SEN led to them excluding themselves from participation in PE or refusing to take part. Maher (2017) reported similar results in his research with SENCOs claiming that students had withdrawn themselves from PE entirely, a finding which is similarly noted by Fitzgerald (2005) and Penny (2006) who explored the concept of students with SEN disengaging from PE. Significant potential exists here for the role of the SNA in PE in terms of working to encourage and support the students with SEN to ensure that they are taking part to the best of their ability in PE. A recognition of the importance of participation in this compulsory subject, to achieve physical, cognitive, social and affective learning experiences (Casey and Goodyear 2015), must be realized through the provision of meaningful learning encounters in PE using all resources available to PE Teachers, such as the assistance of SNAs.

Inclusion confusion

In this research study it was found that often times the best way to get a student with SEN involved in PE was to offer them a separate activity, either with a small group or individually. What was particularly interesting about this finding was the concern expressed by participants as to whether this was inclusion or exclusion as

they were not doing the same as everyone else in PE. It is interesting to discuss here the difference between equality Vs equity, whereby equality is treating everyone the same but equity is giving everyone what they need to be successful (Burbules, Lord and Sherman 1982). As Albert Einstein famously said “Everybody is a genius, but if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will spend its whole life believing that it is stupid”. Applying this logic to inclusion in PE highlights the philosophical side of inclusion, whereby it is more than “merely an act of placing children of all abilities into the same “inclusive” environment” (Block 1999). In other words, what is important about inclusion in PE for students with SEN is that they are given the opportunity and support to be successful and to achieve at their own ability rather than ensuring they are placed in the same environment as all other students. This theory led to the development of an “Inclusion Spectrum” in PE (Black and Stevenson 2007) whereby inclusion can happen at different levels from full inclusion in same activities to partial inclusion using separate activities suitable to the student with SEN in the same environment (see Figure 1.1). It appears that PE Teachers and SNAs in this research were not aware of this theory and method of inclusion, and thus, although they were actually implementing the practical aspect of it at times through small groups or separate activities, they were not confident that this was achieving inclusion and thus expressed concerns as illustrated above. This lack of knowledge on what constitutes inclusion could be seen to be hindering the inclusion process in PE and perhaps could be linked with the finding discussed earlier in this chapter whereby there was a discrepancy in the reporting of “inclusion in PE” and “enjoyment in PE”, as perhaps the definition of “inclusion in PE” was taken as meaning all students doing the same thing at the same time.

The use of small groups or separate activities for students with SEN was similarly reported by Maher (2017), in particular in their use for developing skills needed to be able to take part in the main learning activity in PE, especially when it relates to

a team game. SENCOs in the same research study suggested that they would sometimes start off implementing individual activities and build it up to small groups with the underlying aim that students will be able to integrate back to the main activity when they are ready. Importantly, it was made clear that these activities would occur in the same place as the main activity in PE, but in a cordoned off area.

This concept can be aligned with the principle of “Least Restrictive Environment” whereby students with disabilities are educated with their typically developing peers to the maximum extent possible, meaning that students with SEN should be removed from the general education environment only when the nature or severity of the SEN will not allow the child to benefit from the programme, even with the use of supplemental aids or supports (Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Sec. 794). It is important to state therefore that on the continuum of the inclusion spectrum and through the correct application of the LRE principle, that the use of separate programmes of activity for students with SEN should not be seen as the first choice for inclusion in PE, but rather as an inclusion option if open activities, modified activities, and parallel activities will not work to the benefit of the student concerned. This alternative would be particularly beneficial in preference to the complete withdrawal or self-exclusion from PE of students with SEN which was referred to earlier in this chapter. In other words, the aim should still always be to work towards full inclusion where ever possible but equally some participation is preferential to no participation at all.

In scenarios where students with SEN are seen to be unable to take part in what has been planned for a PE lesson, an array of existing research (Maher 2016; Haycock and Smith 2011; Fitzgerald 2005; Smith 2004; Penney and Harris 1997) has suggests that it was not unusual for such students to be removed from a PE lesson, or participate in separate extracurricular physical activities.

In relation to the main aim of this research, the role of SNA in PE, the practical application of the inclusion spectrum in terms of separate and parallel activities and implementing modified activities, provides evident potential for the involvement of

the SNA in PE to support the inclusion of students with SEN under the guidance of the PE teacher.

Factors promoting inclusion in PE

Peer support and encouragement

The occurrence of peer support and encouragement for students with SEN in PE was mentioned in this research by a number of SNAs. Given that a major incentive for placing students with SEN in mainstream education is to reap the social benefits of interactions with peers (Cullinan, Sabornie, and Crossland 1992; Ferguson and Asch 1989; Johnson and Johnson 1991; Madden and Slavin 1983; Wehman 1990) and gain the opportunity to form peer relationships, it is promising to hear from participants in this study that peer encouragement and support took place in PE and that it was a factor in promoting the inclusion of students with SEN in PE. Research has supported this finding, linking positive peer interactions to increased achievement (Johnson 1981; Yager, Johnson, and Johnson 1985) and increased self-esteem (Branthwaite 1985; Kirova 2001; Nave 1990). It must be noted however that research to the contrary also exists showing that in many instances peer bullying can occur in PE (Jackson 2002; Fitzgerald 2007; Fitzgerald 2003). Perhaps if this research was exploring inclusion in PE from the perspective of the students with SEN, this finding may have emerged, however it was not evident from the participants in this research. In addition to this, some research has suggested that paraprofessionals working with students with SEN in PE can lead to exclusion from peer interactions and the forming of peer relationships (Giangreco, Edelman, Luiselli, and MacFarland 1997; Marks, Schrader, and Levine 1999; Shulka, Kennedy, and Cushing 1999), in particular in relation to paraprofessional proximity to the student with SEN (Giangreco et al. 1997). Again this finding was not supported in this research but it is worth considering in relation to the role which the SNA may be playing PE, to ensure the role is promoting inclusion and peer interactions rather than hindering them. It is equally important

of course to recognize that at times, for students with severe disabilities, peer interactions and relationships may not occur naturally at all without appropriate support being provided to encourage such connections (Evans et al. 1992).

An additional finding on the theme of peers in PE was that when peers were asked to support students with SEN in PE, it appeared to help to foster positive attitudes towards inclusion from the students without SEN. This finding is largely supported in the literature (Lieberman, James and Ludwa 2004; Slininger, Sherrill, and Jankowski, 2000; Vogler, Koranda, and Romance, 2000) with scholars explaining that often interactions between students with and without SEN in mainstream environments can lead to more positive attitudes towards disability, an occurrence which can be explained by contact theory (Allport 1954). This theory suggests that frequent, meaningful, and pleasant interactions between individuals with differences tend to produce changes in attitude (Allport, 1954; Sherrill, 2003; Lieberman, James and Ludwa 2004). Furthermore, it was found in this research study that students without SEN who may have displayed problematic behaviours in PE, were better behaved when asked to work together with students with SEN. This finding has been eluded to in research by Vandercook et al., (1998) who found that the opportunity to learn from and care for one another enriches the lives of students.

Valuing the importance of PE for students with SEN

A factor in this research which evidently promoted the inclusion of students with SEN in PE, was the finding that PE Teachers and SNAs greatly valued the importance of PE for students with SEN. Ninety-eight percent of PE Teachers and SNAs stated that PE was as important as other academic subjects for students with SEN. Many participants went further to suggest that in fact PE was more

important than academic subjects for some students with SEN as many of the students excelled in PE more than in classroom based subjects. Furthermore it was stated that PE allowed socialisation, interaction and a space to express oneself and that it was a good outlet for behavioural difficulties. These findings were supported by existing research which states that PE is particularly important for individuals with various physical, mental and developmental disabilities (Cooper and Quatrano, 1999), due to the potential for social gains, improvements in self-confidence and the provision of an arena for inclusion with peers (Shifflett et al, 1994; Sherrill, 2004; Balfe and Travers, 2011). In light of the most prevalent types of SEN of students which appeared to present in schools within this research, this finding suggesting PE is important for social gains and interaction, carries particular substance. For instance, students with learning disabilities, autism and emotional behavioral difficulties, which were the main types of SEN reported in this research, are quite probably the students which would be in the most need for increased social interaction in a formal setting, due to the nature of their SEN often being reported to lead to social isolation and stigmatization (Magsamen-Conrad, Tetteh and Lee, 2016; Scior, 2011; Barr and Bracchitta, 2015)

In line with this finding, the vast majority of participants in this research (74% of PE teachers and 81% of SNAs) also selected “Increasing time socialising and playing games with peers” as being the “Most Beneficial” outcome of PE for students with SEN. Research has identified that students with SEN agree with this finding in that they see the main reason for taking part in PE as being the social element (Atkinson and Black, 2006).

The finding in this research that illustrates a relationship between SNAs selection of the importance of benefits of PE with the perceived enjoyment of and inclusion in PE are of particular interest in potentially explaining the disparity between the selection of students with SEN being fully included in PE versus students with SEN enjoying PE. The results showed that SNAs who perceived “increasing time socialising and playing games with peers” was one of the “most important” benefits of PE, were statistically more likely to have also selected that students with SEN

enjoyed PE ($U=3430$, $p<.05$). Perhaps there is an indication within this finding that SNAs measured enjoyment of PE based on the students with SENs levels of engagement in social activities with peers during PE class, but did not necessarily equate that with meaning the students were fully included in PE. In support of this, the results illustrating that a significant relationship existed between SNAs who selected *“improvements in fitness levels”* ($U=3045$, $p<.05$) and *“Learning new sports and physical activities”* ($U=2761$, $p<.05$), as the “most important” benefits of PE, were statistically more likely to believe that the students with SEN they worked with were included in PE. Therefore, potentially indicating that the SNAs measures of inclusion in PE were formed more around the students’ ability to gain benefits in the areas of fitness, sports and physical activities. This theory could somewhat explain the discrepancy between the reported levels of inclusion in, and enjoyment of, PE in this research, and also perhaps the research conducted by Meegan (2010), in that our perceptions of what makes PE inclusive or enjoyable are very much subjective to our own beliefs about what the importance of PE is. This is worth considering in relation to the role of the SNA in PE because if the SNA is determining what role they should be fulfilling in PE based on their own perceptions of what a student should be achieving in PE, then there will remain a large amount of inconsistency with regard to the practices being implemented.

The fact that PE Teachers and SNAs in this research identified with the importance of PE for students with SEN is a positive indicator towards promoting inclusion in PE, as it has been previously disclosed in the literature that one of the most important factors in promoting successful inclusion in PE is the attitude of the PE Teacher toward teaching students with SEN (Block & Obrusnikova, 2007; S Lytle & Collier, 2002; Combs, Elliott, & Whipple, 2010).

Another finding which is of interest in this research is one which suggests that PE appeared to be a positive platform to allow relationship building between the SNA and the student. This is a contentious issue, as whilst it is important for students with SEN to have the support of the SNA in PE, in particular in light of the fact that

PE can be an arena whereby students with SEN may feel their limitations become exposed (Duesund, 1993), it is equally important to recognise the potentially detrimental impact the presence of para professionals can have on the social interaction of students with SEN with their peers in PE (Atkinson and Black, 2006; Fitzgerald, Jobling and Kirk, 2003a, 2003b; Morley et al., 2005; Smith and Green, 2004). This will be explored in more detail in the section concerning the role of the SNA in PE but it is important to consider it at this point also.

Non-participating Roles

The option of offering students with SEN a non-participatory role in PE emerged from the focus groups as an alternative method to encourage inclusion in PE, a finding which has been common in other literature on inclusion in PE for example (Meegan, 2010; Maher, 2017; Fitzgerald, 2005). What is most interesting about this finding is the perception of participants in this research that this was a positive method of achieving inclusion in PE, because they are seen to be involved in the lesson. Perhaps this is a valid point by participants, in that it is better to have the student with SEN doing something in PE rather than not be involved at all, in the hope that the student will gain some of the social benefits of participation with peers. However, to perceive this as true inclusion in PE is perhaps a stretch. In this scenario students with SEN are not receiving the same learning experiences as their peers and it could be argued that in fact they are being seen as the 'problem' needing a solution (i.e a non-participatory role) rather than the problem being the way the PE class is being organized and taught (Maher, 2017).

Planning, Adapting and Communicating

A finding from this research indicated that the preparation of individualised plans for PE and adapting activities to ensure the inclusion of students with SEN was important for promoting inclusion in PE. This is a finding which has been similarly documented by Maher (2017) in his research with SENCOs who placed huge

importance on the use of subject-specific information and learning targets to increase teacher and LSA knowledge and to ensure an understanding of how best to meet student needs (Maher, 2013). The significance of planning lessons to fit individual needs (Maher, 2014) has also been drawn on in additional research (Maher, 2010; Morley et al., 2005; Smith, 2004) which found a lack of such planning as being detrimental to the inclusion of students with SEN in PE. As a result these students were expected to “succumb to the dominant culture by assimilating into ...the established arrangements of PE lessons that were intended for those students without SEN.” (Maher, 2014, p. 273).

Crucially for both of the above findings in relation to the primary focus of this research, there is an obvious role presented for SNAs to assist in both the development of individualized plans and suitable adaptations through the sharing of information related to the specific needs of the students with SEN. This will be discussed in greater details in the section on the Role of SNA in PE. Relatedly, this research found that having open communication between the SNAs and PE Teacher regarding the students’ abilities and the lesson plans aided in including students with SEN, an idea which has been well supported by international research exploring the role of the Para Educator in PE (Maher, 2014). This finding echoes the finding earlier in the chapter which mentioned the desire from SNAs to have PE teachers communicating their lesson plans for the class prior to the commencement of the class. It would appear therefore that allowing time for communication between the SNA and PE teacher prior to the class would be mutually beneficially to both parties and ultimately would have a positive impact on the inclusion of the students with SEN.

RQ3. What are the current roles and responsibilities of the SNA in mainstream post primary schools and what factors influence these roles, from the perspective of the SNA and PE Teacher?

Roles and Responsibilities

The Special Needs Assistant (SNA) scheme is designed to provide schools with additional adult support staff that can assist children with who also have additional and significant care needs. The tasks which SNAs are prescribed to fulfill to meet such care needs are divided into primary and secondary tasks. The SNA will be allocated on the basis of students requiring assistance with primary tasks but the SNA may support the student through secondary tasks once they are allocated to the student. The primary tasks outlined by the DES (2014) in Circular 0030/2014 include:

- Assistance with feeding
- Administration of medicine
- Assistance with toileting and general hygiene
- Assistance with mobility and orientation
- Assisting teachers to provide supervision in the class, playground and school grounds
- Non-nursing care needs associated with specific medical conditions
- Care needs requiring frequent interventions including withdrawal of a student from a classroom when essential

- Assistance with moving and lifting of children, operation of hoists and equipment.
- Assistance with severe communication difficulties including enabling curriculum access for students with physical disabilities or sensory needs and those with significant, and identified social and emotional difficulties

The findings of this research in relation to the roles and responsibilities of SNAs in mainstream education are noteworthy due to the wide range of roles reported by both SNAs themselves PE teachers and the deviation of those reported roles from the prescribed remit of the SNA in the Circular 0030/2014 (DES, 2014). These findings align with successive studies which have ascertained that the SNA role has evolved beyond the original care duties to include a range of therapeutic, behavior management and pedagogical activities (Logan 2008; Rose and O'Neill 2009; DES 2011a).

The findings from both the questionnaires and focus groups/interviews in relation to the role of SNA in mainstream education, along with the factors which were found to influence these roles, will be discussed collectively under the four key themes which were identified in the results chapter; facilitating learning, assisting teacher and whole class, enabling inclusion and source of support for students.

Facilitating learning

Within the theme of facilitating learning, SNAs in focus groups and interviews stated that an important role revolved around enabling adequate and equal learning, at a level which was accessible to the student with SEN. This was achieved by SNAs through the adaptation and differentiation of class materials. The importance of this role was echoed in the findings from the questionnaire, with 58% of SNAs selecting “Adapting class activities for students with SEN and monitoring individual progress and development” as the most important duty of SNAs. Interestingly, this role was not seen to be as important by PE teachers, with just 23% selecting it as the most important duty for SNAs.

In exploring these findings further, there are two topics which are of particular interest. Firstly, the insinuation from SNAs that this aspect of their job is important is worth discussing due to the fact that it is a duty of a pedagogical nature, rather than a duty of care. The second point of interest is the discrepancy between the perceptions of the SNA and the PE teachers in relation to the importance of this role for SNAs. These findings are especially noteworthy in relation to Circular 0030/2014 (DES, 2014) which outlines the role of the SNA.

For example, Circular 0030/2014 clearly stipulates that SNAs are allocated to assist teachers in meeting the care needs of students, and that they should be assigned duties of a non-teaching nature. It is apparent therefore that tensions exist between policy and practice in relation to this aspect of the role of the SNA. In practice this has changed in schools to include an educational remit, a finding which is not unique to this research and has been well documented elsewhere, for a full review see (Lawlor and Cregan 2003; Logan 2006; O'Neill and Rose 2008; Department of Education and Skills 2011; Keating and O'Connor 2012; Spens 2013; Kerins and McDonagh, 2015; Kerins et al., 2018). Kerins and McDonagh (2015) illustrated a particularly similar finding to this research, with 67% of SNAs stating that they were "modifying classwork for students with SEN".

Interestingly, Circular 0030/2014 (DES, 2014) specifically articulates to teachers that students with SEN can have very complex learning needs, and stresses that these students should be taught by qualified and experienced teachers. Perhaps therefore, an explanation for the difference between the reporting of the importance of this role by SNAs and PE teachers is indicative of the fact that PE teachers are aware that this is not within the prescribed remit of the SNA role. It is quite possible however that they are not aware of the fact that SNAs are playing this role in classrooms regardless of this, or perhaps that they are aware of it occurring but do not approve of SNAs fulfilling this role. This presents a thought-provoking predicament in relation to the circular versus actual roles of the SNA and also in relation to the appropriateness of SNAs fulfilling roles beyond their prescribed remit.

Findings from this research contained multiple indications that the notion of circular versus actual roles was a factor which was of concern to SNAs. It was apparent that SNAs took on a variety of additional roles, despite being aware that they were outside of their job descriptions, as they felt it was necessary to ensure the inclusion of the students with SEN with whom they worked. It appeared that the majority of these additional roles were of a pedagogical nature, as has been outlined above and as has been documented in existing research (Lawlor and Cregan, 2003; Carrig, 2004; Kerins and Mc Donagh 2005; Logan, 2006; O'Neill and Rose, 2008; DES, 2011).

Much debate concerning the actual role of the SNA versus the prescribed role has been explored by various authors, with numerous studies determining that the post has evolved beyond the original care duties to encompass a range of therapeutic, behaviour management and pedagogical activities (Logan 2008; Rose and O'Neill 2009; DES 2011a; Keating and O Connor, 2012; Spens, 2013). Additionally, it has been stated that the role of the SNA should instead continue to conform to the remit prescribed by the DES (Keating and O Connor, 2012). However, it would appear from the current study that SNAs themselves are continuing to take on additional roles, due to perceived needs of the students with SEN, which they ultimately cannot find any other way to meet. What is clear therefore is that there is a definite educational remit to the role of the SNA, a role which is obviously needed for the students with SEN to learn in the mainstream environment. Nevertheless, it is also apparent that the SNA is most likely not the most appropriate person to be carrying out this role, due mostly to their lack of relevant training and qualifications (Keating and O'Connor, 2012; Kerins and Mc Donagh, 2015; Ware et al., 2009). What is not clear though, is who indeed should be meeting this obvious need for additional educational assistance in the classroom. Given that the majority of research appears to be implying that the classroom teacher, in many instances, is unable to meet the needs of all students with SEN, additional teaching support is undeniably needed. This is an area of concern which requires more exploration and undeniably requires some action from the DES in terms of meeting the obvious educational needs which exists, a

need which it seems SNAs are currently being left to meet, despite lacking the qualifications to do so.

The comprehensive review of the SNA scheme most recently conducted by the NCSE (2018) also alluded to the concerns surrounding the teaching roles being fulfilled by SNAs. It was concluded that while the evidence all suggests that SNAs are fulfilling such roles in schools, the research remains insufficient to recommend that the role of the SNA be officially expanded to include such remit at this time. This viewpoint was taken in particular due to the allocation of additional special education teachers in recent years which should be sufficient to cater for the additional learning needs of students with SEN if deployed correctly by schools. Furthermore the report alluded to the fact that the DES has continued to recommend that the class/subject teacher would bear the primary responsibility for the education and care of all students in their class (NCSE 2018).

With some of the research being referred to throughout this discussion chapter being based on the roles of paraprofessionals internationally, it is important to point out here that the role of the SNA in Ireland differs significantly from that of the teaching assistant/Learning Support Assistant role in England, or the paraprofessional/paraeducator role in the United States. Such roles do include the provision of instructional and teaching support to students with SEN, in addition to support for care needs (Kerins et al. 2018). In spite of this however, international literature has also illustrated ambiguity about the role of support staff in these countries, in particular in relation to the teaching role which they take on (in the UK, see: Webster et al. 2010; Bach, Kessler, and Heron 2004; Beeson, Kerry, and Kerry 2003; Cremin, Thomas, and Vincett 2005; and in the USA see: Angelides, Constantinou, and Leigh 2009; Giangreco 2010). For example Webster et al (2010) found that students with SEN had more interactions with TAs than teachers but that the quality of such interactions in relation to teaching were questionable. They stated that TAs focused more on task completion than task understanding; often leading to students becoming more passive learners. Therefore concerns were

raised about how much time the TAs should be spending directly teaching the students rather than assisting the teacher to do so.

Of additional interest regarding this role was the finding in this research that SNAs working with students with specific learning disabilities were significantly more likely to be fulfilling the role of “adapting class activities for students with SEN”, than SNAs who worked with students with other types of SEN. While this finding linking specific SEN types to the role of the SNA has not been specifically reported by any existing literature, it is perhaps predictable that students with learning difficulties would be the ones who would be most likely to get this type of support in the classroom. However, the suggestion by Logan (2008, p 8) that the inappropriate deployment of SNAs to teaching roles compromises students right to an equal and inclusive education, by allocating ‘... the least powerful staff to the least powerful students”, would appear to be particularly relevant in this scenario. Instead, of course, such provision should be met by trained special educational needs teachers and perhaps with the introduction of the new allocation model (NCSE 2014; DES 2017) and the recommendations from the comprehensive review of SNA scheme for a greater model of support (NCSE 2018), the correct support will be more readily available to students in the near future.

Another aspect of the relationship between specific learning disabilities, and the pedagogical role of the SNA that is worthy of consideration, is a potential question over the allocation of SNAs to students with such needs in the first instance. Such concern has been expressed in existing literature in relation to the debatable presence of the “significant care needs” (Kerins and McDonagh 2015, p.38) of students with dyslexia (a common type of specific learning disability). With a relatively high percentage of SNAs in this research working with students with specific learning disabilities (47%), along with similar incidence reported in other research studies (Kerins and Mc Donagh 2015), perhaps it could be conceptualized that the reportedly high occurrence of SNAs performing activities of a teaching nature has more to do with the similarly high numbers of SNAs working with students with learning difficulties, than any of the other speculated factors.

Assisting Teacher and Whole Class

Assisting Teachers

The role of “*Assisting the class teacher*” was not one which was deemed to be of particular importance by SNAs and PE Teachers in the questionnaire findings, with just 18% of PE Teachers and 27% of SNAs selecting this as being the “*Most Important*” duty of the SNA. However, a higher percentage (24% PE Teachers and 38% SNAs) selected “*Advising class Teachers on how best to include or adapt activities for student with SEN*” as being the “*Most Important*” role of SNAs. Therefore if one considers both of these roles under the theme of Assisting Teachers it would appear that this aspect of the role is quite prevalent, in particular from the perspective of the SNA.

Interestingly this role appeared to be more predominant in the focus groups and interviews, but it was indicated that the help to the teacher came mainly indirectly through assisting the student in the class, helping the teacher to help the student or indeed helping the other students in the class. Perhaps it could be said therefore that the roles offered for selection in the questionnaire did not fully encapsulate the role of the SNA whereas the focus groups and interviews allowed for a greater expansion of this aspect of the role. The role of “*Assisting the class teacher*” in the questionnaire for example, may have been misinterpreted to mean that the SNA would work as a teaching assistant rather than indirectly assisting the teacher as in the ways outlined above.

Additionally, this research identified that SNAs who worked with students with Autism were significantly more likely than SNAs who did not, to select the role of “*Assisting class teacher*” as being one of the most important roles of the SNA. While potential reasons for this relationship were not explored during this research, it could be hypothesized that SNAs working with students with autism did not work directly with them in the classroom and therefore were able to offer assistance to

the class teacher. Conceivably, this is due to SNAs being more involved with providing assistance with care needs and mobility/orientation between class periods for students with autism, and thus wanting to offer independence to the students during class, a concept which was supported by existing research exploring roles of teaching assistants (Alston and Kilham 2004). Comparatively, for example, SNAs who work with students with SLD would need to be more involved with assisting the student with class work during class time, as outlined in the section above detailing the role of “Facilitating learning”, and thus would not have as much time to assist the class teacher.

The DES circular 0030/2014 corresponds with the duties of the SNA as outlined above in relation to the indirect assistance to the class teacher. For example the circular references the importance of the SNA in providing assistance to the teachers in meeting the care needs of students and in ensuring that the student is able to access education. It is also made clear that the SNA must not act as a teacher’s assistant (Kerins et al., 2018). The finding of this current study would appear to correlate well with the guidelines from the DES (2014) in relation to the indirect assistance to class teachers which the SNA provides.

Interestingly however, concern has been raised in the recent comprehensive review of the SNA scheme (NCSE 2018) with regards to reports that teachers can become over-dependent on SNAs and see them as the ‘expert’ on the student with care needs. The potentially concerning consequences of such scenarios would be that teachers may relinquish responsibility for the care and education of students with SEN in their classroom and ultimately this could result in a lack of confidence in teachers own ability to teach such students.

A further issue in relation to the role of the SNA “*assisting the class teacher*” was the finding in this research that sometimes a negative relationship between the teacher and the SNAs had an influence on the ability of the SNA to play a role in the classroom. More specifically, this research identified that in a number of instances the SNA would be asked, or told, not to attend the class with the students with SEN, or that it would be obvious to the SNA that they were not

wanted in the classroom if they did attend. This is a phenomenon which it appears is not unique to this research study, with Egilson and Traustadottir (2009) also reporting that for a variety of reasons not all teachers are comfortable with having another person in the classroom. In contrast to this, research by Keating and O'Connor (2012) found that the majority of SNAs (94%) considered their presence was valued by teachers and a high proportion (60%) indicated they had an 'excellent' or 'very good' professional relationship.

Perhaps the lower prevalence of PE teachers versus SNAs selecting "Assisting class teacher" as an important role for the SNA in this research is somewhat indicative of the negative relationship which was alluded to in this research. Indeed, it could be hypothesized that whilst the SNAs feel it is important to fulfill this role, the assistance possibly is not welcomed by many teachers. In exploring this issue in more detail it is plausible that a number of motives could be attributed to causing this sometimes strained relationship, with research predominately pointing to issues including respect between professions (House of Oireachtas, 2016;) teachers management skills/training (Rubie Davies et al. 2010), lack of collaboration (Flatman and Watson 2009; Logan and Feiler 2006), ambiguity of the role of the SNA (Keating and O'Connor, 2012) and lack of clear guidance from school management (Ofsted 2010). Additionally, links could also be made here in relation to the finding discussed under the theme facilitating learning, whereby PE teachers did not view the pedagogical nature of the role of the SNA as being as important as the SNA perceived it to be. Perhaps, as alluded to in discussing that finding, the teachers feel that SNAs should not be acting outside their job description due, in part, to a lack of qualifications and training to do so.

Whilst it is somewhat beyond the scope of this research to go into this theory in greater detail due to such attitudes not being explored with PE teachers in this study, it is important to recognize the possible implications that a strained relationship between PE teachers and SNAs would have on the potential role of the SNA in PE. This would seem to be particularly important in scenarios where SNAs were being tasked with duties beyond their expertise and qualifications. A

recommendation from this research would certainly be to explore the relationship between the SNA and teachers in more detail and to develop some practical guidelines to allow for a positive working relationship between both professions.

Assisting Whole Class

One of the key findings in this study, in relation to assisting the class teacher as mentioned above, was helping all other students in the class, or supporting the whole class. This finding was reflected in previous research conducted on the role of the SNA in Ireland with Spens (2013) reporting that 32% of teachers and SNAs reported that SNAs generally work with all the students in the classroom and a further 21% stated that SNAs work with a small group of students in the classroom. Additional research by Logan (2006) notes that 73% of SNAs work with their assigned students, along with working with others in the class. O'Neill and Rose (2008) further remarked that 63% of SNAs work every day or often with groups in the classroom. Research on teachers assistants (TAs) in England further supported this finding stating that TAs were often expected to support other members of the class if required (Gibson, 2016 ;Takala, 2007).

It is worth stating here that the DES 0030/2014 does specifically mention that SNAs are not allocated to individual students but to schools, as a school based resource with the NCSE allocating SNA support to each school based on the care needs of all qualifying children enrolled in the school. Therefore it could be said that it is perhaps not surprising to find that SNAs are not solely working with one individual in the classroom. With some research identifying over reliance on paraprofessional support as causing potential isolation (Booth, Ainscow and Dyson, 1998; Tews and Lupart, 2008; Carrig, 2004; Egilson and Traustadottir, 2009) and stigmatization (Fitzgerald, 2007) for students with SEN, along with hampering the development of independence for these students (Fox, 1993; Northern Ireland, 2006; Giangreco et al., 2005; Ainscow, 2000), it is fair to stipulate that this model of allocation of SNAs is preferred over allocation to individual students. However, it must be recognized that there was a sense within the focus groups and interviews that at times SNAs felt “over stretched” in attempting to

assist all students in the class, potentially as a result of being seen as a whole school resource rather than an individual student resource. This could be further intensified in certain schools where for example there are high numbers of students with SEN, who may not be allocated SNA support, but still require quite a lot of assistance. This issue was alluded to in the section on inclusion practices in this chapter, whereby the calculated ratio of students with SEN to SNAs in schools was a very high 14:1 reported by PE Teachers and 10:1 by SNAs.

What is interesting to consider here is whether class teachers are aware of which of the students with SEN the SNA is allocated to work with, and in accordance with this, whether some class teachers may have an expectation that SNAs would be somewhat responsible for all students with SEN in the class. Whilst evidence of this was not directly found in any research based in Ireland, an interesting study conducted in America by McCubbin and Van (2013) highlighted this issue. Their research illustrated a particular case whereby a PE teacher stated

“It’s their job to deal with them in the classroom. If they’re out of line....that’s when I turn to the Special Ed instructor, whether it be the aide or teacher, and say, ‘Hey, you deal with it. I don’t have time’” (McCubbin and Van, 2013, p.).

In Ireland, it is clearly stated that;

“The class or subject teacher has the primary responsibility for the progress of all students in their class, including those with special educational needs” (NCSE 2010, p. 71),

In theory, this should avoid the type of attitude alluded to in the research by McCubbin and Van (2013) above. However, the sense that SNAs were feeling under some pressure to assist all students with SEN in classes in this current research, along with findings that many teachers do not feel equipped to teach students with SEN (Morley et al. 2005; Smith and Green, 2004; Vickerman, 2002, 2007; Block and Obrusnikova, 2007), is a potential area of tension within the expected role of the SNA. This is an area which warrants further research through

a more in depth exploration of expected roles of the SNA from teachers and SNAs perspectives, supported perhaps by classroom observations or case studies.

In relation to factors which influenced the role of the SNA, the issue raised above concerning the SNAs being stretched over a number of students and students with SEN having shared SNA access, was deemed to be highly significant in focus groups and interviews in this research. Takala (2007) and Gibson (2016) also reported that TAs in the UK and Australia were often expected to support other members of the class if required, which further supports the findings of this study.

Findings in the literature also allude to this potential issue particularly in relation to inclusion being resource sensitive (Keating and O Connor, 2012) and seeing the SNA as a “whole school resource” (DES, Circular 0030/2014, pg. 15), which could be misinterpreted in many ways and lead to SNAs being under pressure and over extended (House of Oireachas, 2016). In relation to this however, it is important to state that since this research commenced, a new allocation model for additional teaching supports was introduced by the DES (2017). This new allocation model is based on schools educational profile which consists of two components:

- Baseline component provided to every mainstream school to support inclusion, assistance with learning difficulties and early intervention, and
- A school educational profile component, which takes into account: - The number of students with complex needs enrolled to the school. - The learning support needs of students as evidenced by standardised test results. - The social context of the school including disadvantage and gender.

This new model is proposed to give a fairer allocation of special needs resources to schools based on the schools needs and whilst it does not concern the allocation of SNAs, it may alleviate some of the pressure which schools were feeling during this research which was potentially leading to SNAs needed to assist a large number of students in the classroom. Furthermore the NCSE comprehensive review of the SNA scheme has also made recommendations for a

new frontloaded allocation model of SNAs which would follow a somewhat similar structure to that of the special needs resources model and would remove the need for a professional disability diagnoses in order to gain access to an SNA (NCSE 2018). These two changes to the support systems for students with SEN have the potential to improve the situation which has been portrayed in this research implying the over stretched resources and man power to meet all students needs.

Focus groups and interviews in this research further identified the indirect assistance of SNAs to class teachers through the facilitation of a smooth learning environment for all by ensuring that students' behavior does not disrupt other students in the class. This is a responsibility which will be further explored under the theme "Enabling Inclusion" and is an area of responsibility for SNAs which has been well documented in the literature both in Ireland and internationally (Kerins and Mc Donagh 2015; Gibson 2016).

Enabling inclusion

Enabling inclusion was observed as a prevalent responsibility for SNAs in focus groups and interviews. Likewise in the questionnaire findings, the SNA duties which were selected by SNAs and PE teachers as being the "most important" are well connected with the theme of enabling inclusion.

Namely, these duties were "Assisting students with SEN with specific difficulties individual to student" (78% SNAs and 60% PE Teachers) and "Assisting in the inclusion of students with SEN into class and school settings" (SNAs 76% and PE Teachers 43%). Whilst it is evident that there is a considerable difference between the high percentage of SNAs and the lower percentage of PE teachers selecting these duties, it is worthwhile to note that an examination of the selection of roles in ranking order illustrates that these roles were selected as the first and second "Most Important" duties respectively, by both SNAs and PE Teachers. The explanation for the lower percentage of PE teachers selecting the duties as "Most

Important” would appear to be due to a large majority of PE teachers dividing their selections between “Very Important” and “Most Important” unlike the SNAs who predominantly selected “Most Important”. The results of the Mann Whitney U test supported this by illustrating that significantly more SNAs chose all of the roles of the SNA as being more important than PE teachers.

Statistical analysis also indicated that the duty of “Assisting students with SEN with specific difficulties individual to student” was significantly more likely to be selected by SNAs who worked with students with sensory disabilities while the duty “Assisting in the inclusion of students with SEN into class and school settings” was statistically more likely to be selected by SNAs working with students with specific learning disabilities. These findings provide further interesting insight into the ways in which duties fulfilled by SNAs can vary depending on needs of students, needs which may be individual to the student or sometimes common amongst certain categories of SEN.

The finding that the role “Assisting students with SEN with specific difficulties individual to student” was selected as being the “Most Important” duty of the SNA is one of particular relevance. The focus on the impact of the individual differences of students with SEN on inclusion practices in schools, is one which was a recurring thread throughout this research study. The predominant concept which was emphasized was that it is difficult to generalize roles, practices and perceptions when they relate to students with SEN, as so much of this area is centrally dependent on the individual student’s needs.

In keeping with this, through the exploration of factors which influenced the role of the SNA within this study, the issue of individual students needs was again raised as one which had a major impact on the particular roles SNAs would implement. Additionally, a statistically significant relationship was found between many of the duties of SNAs and the types of SEN of students with whom they worked as outlined above and in the results chapter.

Perhaps it is fair to hypothesize therefore that this dependence on the individuality of students with SEN is one of the factors which causes such disparity and uncertainty in the prescription of the role of the SNAs, by the DES and by schools, along with the clear difference in practice vs policy within the varying roles of the SNA. This assumption is in keeping with literature which has explored inclusion policies and procedures in schools, with findings illustrating that it is the philosophy of individual difference which is central to achieving true inclusion in all environments (DES 2007). It appears however, from the findings within this research, that despite such research advocating for this approach of individual difference in inclusion policy, the direction being given to SNAs by the DES is somewhat failing to recognize this advice.

Discreet Inclusion

An element of enabling inclusion which was referred to in focus groups and interviews, and can also be linked with the reported role in questionnaires of “Assisting in the inclusion of students with SEN into class and school settings”, revolved around a concept which was labelled in this research as discreet inclusion. The label “discreet inclusion” in this research, referred to method which SNAs reported using to enable inclusion in ways which were not overtly obvious to students with SEN, teachers or peers. The methods included providing assistance which would help students with SEN not to “stand out” from others in the class or indeed to “fit in”.

Research findings have outlined that students with SEN can be socially excluded by their peers (Schwab 2015a; Avramidis et al. 2017) and that the influence of attitudes towards disability can have an impact on this level of social exclusion (Schwab 2017). Furthermore it has been reported that subjective norms can have an influence on peers attitudes to disability (Petry 2018). Therefore the roles that SNAs are reportedly fulfilling in relation to helping students with SEN to “fit in”, could be seen to be aiding in social inclusion by peers, due to helping students with SEN to adhere to social norms.

Additionally, such actions by SNAs could also be aiding in the inclusion and acceptance of students with SEN by class teachers. With existing research (Scanlon and Barnes-Holmes 2013; Winter and O'Raw 2010), and findings from this study, highlighting the negative attitudes which can exist towards students with EBD in particular, the discreet withdrawal from the classroom of students who are exhibiting challenging behavior is likely to minimize the negative stereotypes which teachers may hold of students with EBD. This discreet inclusion can be seen to be of pivotal importance in allowing for the social acceptance of students with SEN into mainstream schools.

Indeed, it appeared in this research that the most prominent way that this discreet inclusion occurred was in cases of behavior management. The finding that SNAs have considerable involvement in the management of students' behaviour in this research study is one which has been extensively reported in research on SNAs in Ireland (DES 2011; Kerins and McDonagh 2015), as well as paraprofessionals internationally (Howard and Ford 2007; Gibson 2016).

With students with EBD being reported as the category of SEN to receive one of the highest levels of SNA support according to statistics available in Ireland (NCSE 2010, 2011), along with 84% of PE Teachers and 58% of SNAs in this study identifying EBD as a prevalent type of SEN of students in their schools, it is perhaps unsurprising that managing behavior would feature as a prominent role for the SNA in this research. Circular 07/02 (DES 2002) stipulates that students could be allocated SNA support where their behavior was such that they presented as a danger to themselves or to other students but Circular 0030/2014 (DES 2014) states that students diagnosed within the category of EBD will not automatically receive SNA support and further imposes restrictions in relation to SNA allocation for EBD, including a requirement that schools show evidence that implementation of behavioural management strategies have proven unsuccessful. Despite this the Value for Money and Policy Review of the SNA scheme (DES 2011) found, that in many instances, SNAs were being used, contrary to the intended purpose of the scheme, to contain or manage students behaviour rather than students receiving

appropriate interventions in school through individualised planning, whole-school student management strategies, and additional psycho-educational programmes and psychiatric/medical interventions, as required (DES 2014). The expectation on SNAs to manage challenging behaviour is one which has caused increasing criticism due to the notion that students with the most complex needs are receiving support from members of the school community with potentially the least training to support those needs (Maggin et al.2009). Additional concern has been raised here for the safety and wellbeing of the SNAs who are being left to control sometimes aggressive and dangerous behaviors and the most recent overview of the SNA scheme by the NCSE has recommend that immediate action be taken to review the issue of SNAs being tasked to deal with severe challenging behaviour (NCSE 2018).

Despite these concerns, it was evident from this research that if SNAs were not playing this role of behavior control, in particular in relation to discreet inclusion and at times removal from classroom environments, that not only would the students with SEN find it extremely difficult to be included in mainstream school, but additionally the students without SEN would be increasingly disturbed and distracted from their own learning. Therefore whilst undoubtedly issues exist due to prevalence and perhaps over reliance of this role for SNAs, it would appear that the role is necessary in order to enable the inclusion of many students with SEN into mainstream schools.

Care needs

An additional important role which SNAs were reported as having in relation to enabling inclusion was that of attending to care needs of students with SEN. Fifty percent of SNAs and 32% of PE Teachers selected “Assisting students with SEN with clothing, feeding, toileting etc” to be the “Most Important” role of the SNA, making it the 4th “Most important” role selected by SNAs and 3rd “Most Important” role by PE Teachers. Care needs were also mentioned numerous times during

focus groups and interviews and expanded to include health/medical care along with physical assistance.

Of course, the primary reason for the deployment of SNAs in schools according to the DES Circular 0030/2014 is to 'meet the care support requirements of the children enrolled in the school for whom SNA support has been allocated' (DES 2014, p. 15). This makes it unsurprising that the role of assisting with care needs should feature in our research findings. On the contrary what is perhaps surprising is that this role does not feature more prominently, with it being reported by PE Teachers and SNAs as just the 3rd and 4th "Most important" role which SNAs play. In all likelihood, this can be attributed to the fact that this research was carried out in post-primary school, where it has been suggested that the types of primary care needs outlined in the questionnaire, are not as prevalent as in primary schools and special schools for example (DES 2011). Rather than the types of care needs outlined in the questionnaire, the primary care needs, upon which basis SNAs are deployed, in secondary schools tend to be more linked with access, mobility/orientation, medical needs and necessary withdrawal from classrooms. In line with this, it could be postulated that the roles selected and discussed above "Assisting student with SEN with specific difficulties individual to student" and "Assisting in the inclusion of students with SEN into class and school settings" would in fact contain within their duties a number of primary care needs also, particularly on the basis of discussions held during focus groups and interviews. What this finding seems to insinuate is the term "care needs" (as implied by the circular and implemented by SNAs) is in fact a much broader practice referring to a number of duties personal to the students with SEN, which if not catered for, would not allow them to be included in mainstream education. In taking into account the broader definition and understanding of care needs, research in the Irish context, predominantly found similar findings as were reported in this research (DES 2002; 2005a; 2005b) with Kerins and Mc Donagh (2015) stating that over half of the SNAs in their research clearly indicated they were supporting primary care needs.

Additional analysis of the data also revealed that assisting with care needs was reported as a significantly more important role for SNAs who worked with students with assessed syndromes, autism, general learning disabilities, specific speech and language disorders, physical disabilities and sensory disabilities than SNAs who worked with students with emotional and behavioral disorders, dyspraxia and specific learning disabilities. With no existing literature identifying a statistically significant relationship between duties of the SNA and the type of SEN with whom they work, this finding provides novel and specific insight into the factors which influence the role of the SNA. In particular this finding supports the themes emerging from the qualitative data in this research, which state that the role of the SNA is shaped by the individual needs of the students with whom they work.

Empowerment

Despite research suggesting that para professional support could lead to decreased independence (Fox 1993; Giangreco et al. 2005; Ainscow 2000; Egilson and Traustadottir 2009), SNA participants in this research appeared to be aware that an important responsibility within their roles as SNA was to enable inclusion through the provision of skills and/or support to “give them their independence”. This outcome resonates with findings from McCubbin and Van (2013) and Gibson (2016) who similarly found that para professionals placed a large emphasis on fostering and encouraging independence. What is worth mentioning with regard to the finding of promoting independence is a discussion which occurred in a focus group of SNAs whereby it was proposed that the students with SEN gained independence due to the assistance of the SNA, but in most cases when the SNA was removed the independence diminished. Additionally, it was remarked that if the students did become independent “..... *then the SENO comes out and says, she’s gotten very independent, you don’t need your job anymore!!*” (Focus Group 1, SNA)

This is a fascinating and complex scenario, essentially in theory, the better the job the SNA does at achieving independence for their students, the more likely they are to do themselves out of a job. It would have to be considered therefore whether this has an impact in relation to the role the SNA plays and also the designation of duties by those responsible for the SNA in schools. In particular when considering the suggestion by the DES (2011) that schools invest a lot of time and effort into obtaining SNA support, and as a result are very reluctant to let that support go, even when the student for whom they were granted may not be in need of the support anymore. This situation is one which perhaps requires further exploration and ultimately consideration towards whether the allocation model of SNAs to schools needs to be tailored further. Additionally, it perhaps hints at the reliance of schools on SNAs in order to accommodate the inclusion of all students with SEN, many of whom are not granted SNA support due to being seen as being non-dependent on this assistance.

In light of this, it is also important to note that within the DES (2014) Circular for SNAs 0030/2014 there is specific mention of ensuring that the allocation of a SNA to assist a student must be balanced against the student's need to develop independence. Furthermore, they state that care should be taken to ensure the use of the SNA does not serve to segregate the student with SEN from their classmates or make them more dependent on assistance from others. Autonomy, which has been defined as a person's ability to exercise choice (Crocker and Knight 2005), therefore, would seem to be at the center of this debate. Previous research has alluded to the importance of student autonomy in relation to allowing students to feel fully included in school (Whitburn 2014), along with Booth and Ainscow (2011) observing that it is only when people can assert their autonomy that they feel their membership in a group is secure. Therefore, it seems reasonable that the DES would attempt to avoid the issue of over reliance on SNA support, to ensure that students get the opportunity to develop independence and gain autonomy. However, it would appear that the total withdrawal of, or failure to

allocate, SNA support on the basis of the perceived independence which students may have gained, is somewhat naïve due to the unpredictable and changeable nature of the needs of students with SEN. The insinuation in this research that any independence gained by a student with SEN can be quickly lost if support is taken away too promptly, highlights this concern from the SNAs perspectives.

Source of Support for Students

As Gibson (2016, p.17) conveyed; “Education is not just about academic learning; it encompasses educational, social, and emotional learning. It can enable a student with disabilities to be a positive contributing member of the community. It is incumbent on schools to understand that some students with disabilities may need more support in some areas of learning than others to develop independence”.

Findings from SNA participants in focus groups and interviews in this research strongly advocated for the importance of SNAs in the provision of this social and emotional support. It was indicated that the SNAs felt it was important to build a relationship with the student with whom they worked, that allowed them to provide support and encouragement during their time at school. In relation to the questionnaire results, this finding could potentially be linked to the role of “Assisting student with SEN with specific difficulties individual to student”. Additionally, the need to provide encouragement and motivation to students with SEN could also be linked to the finding that student’s individual challenges, such as fear and low motivation can be a barrier to inclusion in PE. In line with this, a potential role is evident for SNAs in PE which could be seen as crucial role to avoid the exclusion and self-withdrawal of students with SEN from PE.

International research has identified para professionals as taking on support roles comparable to that of the mother, friend and protector (Mc Cubbin and Van 2013; Broer, Doyle, and Giangreco 2005). However, it has been argued that an inadvertent effect of this could be increased social isolation of students with SEN

from their peers, who ideally should be the ones to provide this emotional and social support (Causton-Theoharis and Malmgren 2005). Further research on this did suggest that through the provision of adequate training for paraprofessionals, more appropriate support mechanisms could be put in place which would not act as a barrier to peer interactions (Causton-Theoharis and Malmgren 2005). Nevertheless, this is an important factor to acknowledge in relation to the support role of the SNA, whereby it should never replace or get in the way of potential peer friendships and rather should be used as a method to encourage and assist in the development of such relationships with peers.

RQ4. What is the current and desired role of the SNA in promoting the inclusion of students with SEN in post primary PE, from the perspective of the SNA and PE Teacher?

Roles and Responsibilities

Assisting student participation

The findings of the focus groups, interviews and questionnaires in this research, underlined the value of the role of SNAs in assisting student's participation. The results from the questionnaire which sought to explore the current role played by SNA's in PE indicated that the most prevalent role was to "Assist students to participate in class activities" as selected by 56% of SNAs and 41% of PE Teachers.

This finding is somewhat contradictory to research on the role of paraprofessionals in PE in the UK for example where LSA's were not seen to participate in assisting students in PE as much as they did in other subjects according to PE teachers (Morley 2005; Maher 2017).

It is interesting to note the disparity between the percentage of PE Teachers and SNAs who selected this as best describing the current role in PE, which may imply that SNAs feel they are assisting in the participation of students more so than PE teachers feel it is occurring. Two explanations could exist for this; firstly it could be due to a difference in the understanding of the meaning of assisting participation by both groups. For example the PE teachers might view it as more hands-on assistance whereas the SNAs may see it as more of a discreet assistance, leading to SNAs stating they are carrying out this role but PE teachers not being able to overtly witness it. The other explanation could simply be that SNAs are demonstrating some social desirability bias, and are over reporting carrying out a role which they believe would be well received by the researcher and others who read the results.

Additionally, when participants were asked what best describes the role they would like SNAs to play in PE, the percentage of SNAs and PE Teachers that selected the role “assist student participating in PE” increased noticeably (67% SNAs and 68% PE Teachers). This is a positive finding, in that it indicates that not only are SNAs currently playing a fundamentally active role in enabling inclusion in PE, but also that there is a desire from both SNAs and PE Teachers for this level of participation by SNAs to increase. This desire on behalf of the PE teachers is likely to be due to concerns over their abilities to include all students with SEN into the PE classes, as has been alluded to in existing research (Morley et al. 2005; Smith and Green 2004; Vickerman 2002, 2007). Additionally, in line with high prevalence of students with EBD and the expressed concerns of SNAs towards the teacher’s attitudes to such types of SEN, it could be speculated that the desire to have SNAs having an active role in PE could be to ensure behaviors are managed and the students and teachers are protected from challenging behaviours. This would be in keeping with attitudes expressed in Bryan, McCubbin and Van (2013, p180) whose research of paraeducators in PE in the USA found they often took on roles of protector of both students and teacher when managing student behavior that teachers “did not have time for” . These findings were also supported by Broer, Doyle, and Giangreco (2005) and Marks, Schrader, and Levine (1999).

Focus groups and interviews largely supported this finding and helped to elaborate on the variety of ways in which SNAs assisted in the student's participation in PE. For example these included but were not limited to demonstration of activities, encouragement to participate and adaptation of activities. Furthermore SNAs often stated that they themselves would take part in the activities to try and provide the demonstration and encouragement and that they would apply differentiation techniques to modify the activities to suit the needs of the students with SEN. Fulfilling this role through the aforementioned tasks is a finding which has been echoed by research which examined the role of paraprofessionals in PE in an international context (Davis, Oliver, and Piletic 2007) but as yet, is not an area which has been explored in detail in Ireland, making the findings from this research novel. This finding therefore has the potential to have very significant implications in relation to increasing the inclusion of students with SEN in PE. In light of the findings within this research that just 56% of PE teachers and 59% of SNAs felt that students with SEN were fully included in PE, it is obvious that policies, procedures and practices need to change to facilitate greater inclusion in this subject. These findings indicate that there is great potential in the utilization of SNAs in PE to facilitate this improved inclusion. Importantly, this finding also adds greater substance to the remaining results within this research as the outcomes have the capability to outline policy and practice within the use of SNAs in PE in Ireland.

It is important, however, to consider whether the role outlined above for SNAs in PE, is appropriate for SNAs to fulfill with regards to their prescribed remit and also their qualifications. It would seem fair to suggest that these tasks are in line with those that SNAs are performing in academic classes. Nevertheless it could also be argued that they are somewhat of a pedagogical nature.

In aligning these reported tasks of SNAs in PE with the duties outlined in Circular 0030/2014 however, it could be suggested that due to the practical nature of PE, a number of duties identified by the DES 2014 are being applied in a somewhat implicit manner. For example, the primary care needs outlined in the Circular

including “Assistance with mobility and orientation” and “Assistance with severe communication difficulties including enabling curriculum access”, could be seen to be duties which form the foundation of the tasks being carried out by SNAs in PE. For instance, adaptation of equipment or activities may be needed to provide “assistance with mobility and orientation” and demonstrations could be necessary to provide “Assistance with severe communication difficulties”, which could cause the student to misunderstand the directions given by the PE teacher needed to be able to take part in the PE class. It is fair to say then that these duties appear to be within the remit of the role of the SNA. However, to avoid the potential for SNAs to take on a teaching role via these tasks, it would be imperative that the teaching guidance would come from the PE teacher themselves.

A further outcome under this theme was the indication that a number of SNAs were responsible for the delivery of separate small group activities in PE for students with SEN. Organizing small group or individual activities separately, but parallel to the main activity in PE, is a concept which was explored in depth in the section on “Inclusion in PE”. It was identified that this is sometimes necessary for students with SEN and its implementation can be seen as being appropriate through the application of the inclusion spectrum guidelines.

What is interesting about this finding then is not so much the occurrence of the separate activities, but the fact that SNAs were often tasked with being responsible for these activities. This model of paraprofessionals implementing or supervising separate groups of students with SEN in PE is one which has been extensively reported in the literature as being practiced internationally (Maher 2017; Bryan McCubbin and Van 2013; Maher 2013; Vickerman and Blundell 2012; Haycock and Smith 2011) and so it is perhaps unsurprising that a similar finding was unearthed in this research on SNAs in PE. This is not to take away from the uniqueness of this finding in the Irish context however as research here has not reported this role for SNAs to date.

The benefits of organizing small group activities separate from the main activities in PE for students with SEN have been documented in relation to improving self-

esteem, confidence and skill development which can be beneficial in encouraging and achieving full inclusion back to the main activity when the students are ready for this step (Vickerman and Blundell 2012). However, justifiable concerns have been raised in relation to giving the responsibility for the execution of these activities to paraprofessionals who are not qualified in this area (Maher 2013), and who may not be able to offer a full breadth of activities to the students, which may limit students experiences, have a negative impact on their achievement in PE and negatively affect their confidence (Fitzgerald 2006; Fitzgerald et al. 2003a, 2003b). In addition to this, the issue of social isolation has been raised by Fitzgerald (2005), in relation to students with SEN participating in separate activities, which she indicates can do more to normalize rather than challenge segregation.

Interestingly, whilst research outlined above made reference to the notion that paraprofessionals were underqualified to deliver these lessons, research by Maher (2013) identified that LSAs felt that the insufficient knowledge, skill, experience and confidence of some PE teachers to include students with SEN has in fact been the very reason that paraprofessionals have had to take on this role, stating that otherwise the students would fail to take part at all. This was reflective of some of the feelings which appeared prominent with the SNAs who took part in focus groups and interviews during this research.

Likewise, research by Haycock and Smith (2011) seems to suggest that utilizing paraprofessionals in this way was well received by PE teachers, who viewed them as a helpful “second pair of hands”, enabling them to integrate all students into the curricula and activities already planned, even if some students were not necessarily able to do the activities to the same extent as other students in class.

The insight which could be gained from these findings and the existing research therefore could be that those who are involved in the front line of inclusion in PE (the paraprofessionals and PE teachers) appear to be content with this model of practice, but those who are viewing the practice from the “ivory towers” (Shapin 2012, p.1) of research platforms see it as an inappropriate and inadequate solution (Maher 2013; Fitzgerald 2006; Fitzgerald et al. 2003a, 2003b; Fitzgerald 2005).

Perhaps this is a case of teachers and paraprofessionals having to make the best out of a less than ideal situation at times. In which case the concern being expressed in existing research is warranted if only in an attempt to bring about better solutions. However, in the interim it would seem as though the best use of resources would be to explore how this model of practice can be tailored to limit, or indeed eliminate the negative repercussions and foster the positive outcomes which can be gained by students with SEN through the use of SNAs in this way.

In line with that, the suggestion from the viewpoint of this research would be that there is merit in utilising the SNA in this way due to their expertise in relation to the students with SEN but this must be done under the careful consideration and guidance of the PE Teacher, to ensure best practice is being followed and SNAs are not assuming responsibilities which are far beyond their expertise and remit. This of course requires time, training and collaboration.

Whilst the role of the SNA in PE has not been examined specifically in Ireland, research which has explored the role of paraprofessionals in the classroom in general have also alluded to the need for time, collaboration and training for effective use of paraprofessionals.

Webster et al., (2010) for example found that TAs often felt underprepared for the tasks they were given as there was little or no time to liaise with teachers prior to lessons. Additionally Bedford et al. (2008) noted that teachers recommended that paid time in school for liaison and lesson planning would be beneficial to enable teachers and TAs to collaborate in preparing and supporting curriculum matters.

The need for collaboration has been alluded to by numerous studies who stressed the importance of inclusive partnerships between teachers and paraprofessionals (Ofsted 2010; Flatman and Watson 2009; Blatchford et al. 2011; Bignold and Barbera 2012). It is also an approach endorsed in Ireland, where a whole-school ethos based on the principles of collaboration and team work constitutes a key feature in the effective deployment of SNA support (DES 2011).

A wealth of published research has pointed to the lack of relevant training for SNAs in Ireland and the need for this to improve in accordance with the roles which SNAs are playing (Kerins and McDonagh 2015; Ware et al. 2009). In PE specifically, Maher (2010) and Smith and Green (2004) expressed that PE teachers were critical of the fact that the LSAs in their schools lacked PE-specific training, knowledge and expertise and were supportive of LSAs getting more access to such training. The training needs of SNAs in PE will be discussed in greater detail at the end of this chapter.

Assist PE Teacher and whole class

Another prominent theme to emerge in relation to the role of the SNA in PE from the focus groups, interviews and questionnaires, was that of assisting the PE teacher and whole class. In relation to assisting the PE teacher there were three duties offered for selection by SNA and PE Teacher participants in the questionnaire which can be aligned to this role. The most obvious duty is that of “Assisting the PE teacher in teaching the class”, which was selected by a low number of PE teachers (11%) and SNAs (8%) as being the current and desired (SNAs 16% and PE Teachers 12%) role which SNAs would play in PE. This is not a surprising, or unwelcome, result because this duty is not one which should be advocated for SNAs to fulfil in PE due to their lack of teaching expertise.

A role for the SNA in PE that is more interesting to note in relation to assisting the PE Teacher is that of “Advise PE teacher on how best to include student in class” and “Advise PE teacher on activities / exercises suitable for student”.

“Advising PE teacher on how best to include student in class” was selected by just 18% of SNAs and 15% of PE Teachers as being currently undertaken by SNAs in PE, but interestingly this increased to 32% of SNAs and 37% of PE Teachers when selecting this role as one they have a desire for SNAs to undertake in PE.

This finding is reflective of suggestions in the literature that due to paraprofessionals being most aware of the specific learning needs and requirements of the students they aid; they are perhaps best placed to provide insights to the methods of inclusion for these students (DfES 2001; Lieberman 2007; Haegele and Kozub 2010; Maher 2016; Maher 2017). Insights from the focus groups and interviews in this research also suggested this role was both common and perceived as valuable by the PE Teachers.

In relation to the similar, but more subject specific role of “Advising PE teacher on activities / exercises suitable for students”, the results from the questionnaire were comparable to those of the previous role discussed. Eighteen percent of SNAs and 12% of PE teachers indicated that SNAs were currently playing this role but a greater number suggested that this is a role they would like the SNA to perform in PE (31% SNAs and 33% PE Teachers). The fact that slightly less participants chose this role than the previous role discussed is perhaps due to the realistic perception that SNAs would not have the knowledge or training available to provide this level of advice in comparison to being able to provide information regarding the needs more specific to the students they worked with, and how to generally include these students into PE.

This finding is somewhat reflected in research by Maher (2014) who reported that 91% of LSAs had no input when it came to designing differentiated practice in PE, an issue which he attributed to a possible power disparity between PE Teachers and LSAs when it came to what was being delivered in PE. Whilst at the same time within this research, Maher (2014) reported that at times PE Teachers do attempt to draw on the knowledge and experience of LSAs, for instance asking if they (LSA) feel the class will suit the student's needs. A lack of time and collaborative relationship was again sited in Maher's (2014) research as being the main barrier for the involvement of paraprofessionals in the planning of PE classes. As alluded to by Vickerman and Blundell (2012) the outcomes in PE class are often better when PE teachers and LSAs worked together in planning and delivery, therefore

there should be an increased focus on encouraging a collaborative relationship between PE teachers and paraprofessionals.

In summary then it would appear from the findings of this research along with that of the research outlined above, that the potential for the role of the SNA to take on an advisory capacity in PE is somewhat warranted and desired, but that the limits of this advice should perhaps remain constrained to providing knowledge on the needs of the students with SEN, as oppose to subject specific PE advice.

Health, Safety and Accessibility

The theme of health, safety and accessibility in relation to roles which SNAs play in PE is one which was apparent through the focus groups, interviews and questionnaire comments. The duties which were mainly discussed under this theme included assisting with medical needs, physical safety and also controlling behaviour; for the benefit of the students with SEN, the students in the class and also the teacher. The role of safety and behaviour control have been well document by international research on paraprofessionals in the PE class also (Bryan, McCubbin and Van 2013; Broer, Doyle, and Giangreco 2005; Marks, Schrader, and Levine 1999), with the role of “caregiving” such as attending to medical and health needs being less prevalent but existing in some cases (French and Chopra 1999).

In Ireland, it is worth noting that while no research exists specifically looking at the role of the SNA in PE, the roles outlined within this theme align themselves very appropriately with primary care needs as described by circular 0030/2014 (DES, 2014), including administration of medicine, care needs requiring frequent interventions including withdrawal of a student from a classroom when essential, assisting teachers to provide supervision in the class and non-nursing care needs associated with specific medical conditions.

Due to the physical nature of PE, it was expressed how important these duties were in PE in particular and in some scenarios it was stated that even in cases

where the student did not need any assistance in participating in the class activities, it was seen as vital that the SNA was present in the PE class to ensure the health, safety and well-being of students with SEN. This therefore can be seen as being a role of major importance and one which in fact should probably be given most precedence in relation to the role which SNAs are required to undertake in PE in all instances.

As mentioned above, in some scenarios SNAs did not play a role in relation to directly assisting the participation of students with SEN in PE or assisting the teacher, but still felt it necessary to be present in the class at a minimum. This finding relates well to the role of “Stay and Observe” which was an option on the questionnaire answered by SNAs and PE teachers. This role was selected by a 48% of SNAs and 34% of PE Teachers as being the role which is currently being carried out by SNAs in PE, making it the 2nd most frequently chosen role by SNAs and the 4th most chosen role by PE Teachers. Interestingly however, when asked what role SNAs and PE Teachers would like SNAs to play in PE, the role of “Stay and Observe” was not given as much preference, with just 39% of SNAs and 23% of PE Teachers selecting this option. It could be speculated here that whilst this role is undoubtedly one of crucial importance and very much in keeping with the SNAs prescribed care remit; it perhaps is not given as much esteem by PE teachers in comparison to SNAs, and additionally is not a role which either of the participants are keen to see being increasingly performed. A hypothesis here might be that it is seen as a role which lacks activity, or a hands-on approach from SNAs, and perhaps it is perceived that if the SNA is present in the class they might as well get involved in helping either the student they are assigned to or else helping out the class teacher or others in the class. This supports the notion of the SNA being a whole school resource as outlined by the NCSE (2011) and DES (2014), and one could understand, given the increasingly challenging inclusion climate in schools, why PE teachers and SNAs might feel that all resources available should be utilized to the maximal possible extent.

An additional role which was identified under this theme was that of accessibility to allow participation in PE. Sometimes this took the form of preparing students, such as assisting with changing into PE clothes, before and after the PE class and sometimes with physically assisting access to and during class. This prevalence of this role was also alluded to through the questionnaire responses to roles of “Assisting student preparing for class” and “Assist student in accessing class”.

The role of “Assisting student preparing for class” was selected by 40% of SNAs and 41% of PE Teachers, making it the 3rd most frequently selected role by SNAs and the joint 1st most frequently selected role by PE Teachers. Whilst it is slightly unexpected that this role would be selected in such a high frequency by PE Teachers, it is perhaps somewhat foreseen given the nature of PE involving clothing changes and other issues surrounding preparation of the students. In addition to this the indication from the findings of this research on the general roles of SNAs that “Assistance with clothing, feeding and toileting” were selected as the 3rd and 4th “Most Important” roles by PE Teachers and SNAs respectively can be seen to correlate this finding to some extent. Notably, the selection of this role as a desired one by SNAs and PE teachers remained practically unchanged from the frequency who selected it was currently being done (35% SNAs and 41% PE Teachers). This probably indicates that where this level of care need is required it is being met and there is no need to want any increase in this role being carried out as it is a primary duty of the SNA that will be fulfilled based on the needs of the students they are working with. As with the roles discussed above, this duty is very much in keeping with those suggested by DES (2014) circular 0030/2014 and appears to be fitting and appropriate for SNAs to carry out in PE.

The role of “Assisting student in accessing class” was reported as best describing the current role of the SNA in PE by 33% of SNAs and 24% of PE Teachers, making it the 4th most frequently selected role for SNAs in PE and similarly to the role outlined above, there was not much difference between the selection of this as a current role versus that of a desired role (SNA 36% and PE Teacher 30%).

In conclusion then it appears that the roles which are related to health, safety and accessibility in PE are seen to be important in allowing students with SEN to actually take part or have access to PE. This perhaps is the extent of these roles however, in that they potentially do little to increase the inclusion of the students with SEN once in the PE class. Therefore while they are undeniably important to allow students with SEN to take part in PE class, it is not surprising that there was no great desire for SNAs or PE teachers to increase this role for SNAs in PE.

No Role

Despite the wide ranging roles being played by SNAs in PE as outlined above, there was also significant mention of SNAs playing “No Role” in PE during the focus groups, interviews and questionnaire comments. Two roles on the questionnaire can be seen to be linked with the SNA playing no role in PE, namely: “No Role” and “Drop to and collect student from class”

The percentage of SNAs reporting that they played “No Role” in PE was very low with just 11% of SNAs and 9% of PE Teachers selecting this option. Additionally, this frequency decreased further in relation to those who selected that they would like SNAs to play “No Role” in PE (7% SNAs and 1% PE Teachers).

The other role which could be associated with having no role in PE class itself is that of “Drop to and collect student from class” with 28% of SNAs and 38% of PE Teachers selecting this as best describing the current role of SNAs in PE. This suggests that, from the perception of the PE Teacher at least, this is a role which is relatively common, with it being the 2nd most frequently selected role by these participants. Research by Haycock and Smith (2011) suggested that PE teachers sometimes felt PE was seen as a ‘dumping ground’ by some LSAs and an area of the curriculum that received less support from LSAs compared to other subjects. Perhaps there is an element of this perception ingrained in the above finding in relation to the “Drop and Collect” role. On a positive note however, the numbers of SNA and PE Teacher participants who selected this as a role that they would like the SNA in PE was significantly lower at 14% of SNAs and 21% of PE Teachers.

Despite the fact that this figure is lower it is still worth considering that there is a percentage of PE Teachers and SNAs who would not like any more of a role in PE other than to drop and collect the students to the class. As stated above, a very small percentage who would want “no role” in PE class at all, the possible reasons for this, along with other factors which can influence the role of the SNA in PE, will be explored in the next paragraph.

Factors Influencing the Role of SNAs in PE

Reasons not to play a role in PE

Focus group and interview participants suggested three main reasons why SNA's would sometimes play no role in PE. Firstly it was suggested that SNAs were happier to let their student have independence during PE class. The other reasons indicated that some students with SEN did not want the SNA in the class and additionally, some students with SEN did not need SNA's in the class. These findings were also reflected in the questionnaire with 42% of SNAs and 27% of PE Teachers selecting “Student does not need them” as being the most important reason for playing no role in PE, followed by “student does not want them in the class” (SNAs 32% and PE Teachers 26%). An additional reason outlined in the questionnaire however was that SNAs have “no training in PE or such activities” (SNAs 24% and PE Teachers 22%).

Taking into consideration the suggestion that some students may not need or want SNAs in PE, along with research which has implied that at times the presence of a paraprofessional in lessons, in particular providing one-to-one support, can cause increasing stigmatization, isolation and marginalization (Haycock and Smith 2011; Fitzgerald, Jobling, and Kirk 2003a, 2003b; Morley, Bailey, Tan, and Cooke 2005; Smith and Green, 2004), it is important to recognize that it may not always be appropriate for the SNA to attend PE with the students to whom they are allocated.

In keeping with the common thread throughout this research, the key factor to respect is the individual needs of each student.

Type of SEN of students

Statistical analysis identified many significant relationships between the type of SEN of students that SNAs worked with and the roles they reported fulfilling in PE.

SNAs working with students with autism for example were significantly more likely to fulfil the role of “drop to and collect” students from class and “help students prepare for class”. This is perhaps reflective of the duties commonly fulfilled by paraprofessionals in relation to assisting with the orientation and mobility of students with autism (Alston and Kilham 2004) and also aligns itself with the recommendations for paraprofessionals to encourage independence where the student is capable of taking part in classes without assistance (Symes and Humphrey 2012).

On the other hand SNAs working with students with EBD were significantly more likely to select “stay and observe class” and “*assist student in participating in class*”. This finding is particularly interesting when taken in connection with the finding in this research, and also in existing literature (Bryan, McCubbin and Van 2013; Broer, Doyle, and Giangreco 2005; Marks, Schrader, and Levine 1999), that safety and behavior control were found to be key roles for SNAs in PE class. Furthermore research by Guetzloe (1994) and Shanker (1995) reported that teachers perceive the presence of support staff during the lesson as an integral feature of a successful policy for dealing with children with EBD. Conceivably, the roles identified above as being significantly related to students with EBD therefore are prevalent due to the SNAs need to be present for health and safety reasons above all else. Another factor worthy of consideration here is the reported negative attitudes towards students with invisible disabilities in comparison to visible disabilities, in particular in relation to behavioral needs. It could be speculated on this basis that SNAs who worked with students with EBD felt it necessary, or were

asked by PE teachers, to play a more active role in the PE class to ensure such attitudes did not lead to the exclusion of students from PE.

Interestingly, the other two types of SEN of students which were associated with the role of “*assist student in participating in class*”, were specific learning disabilities and specific speech and language disorder, could also be classified as being “invisible” disabilities. This finding somewhat adds to the suggestion in both this research and international literature (Farrell 2000; Lindsay 2007; Winter and O’Raw 2010, Avramidis, Bayliss and Burden 2000; Meegan and MacPhail 2006; Avramidis and Norwich 2002; Scanlon and Barnes-Holmes, 2013) that PE teachers may have more positive attitudes towards including students with physical and sensory disabilities than learning and/or behavioural disabilities therefore perhaps needing the SNA to play more of an active role to enable the inclusion of such students.

These novel and interesting findings again support the recurring theme in this research that the individual needs of students is the key factor underpinning the variable roles of the SNA. It also substantiates the concept that the role of the SNA in PE, and in general, should not be a “one size fits all” model and in order to provide true inclusion the SNA should be able to tailor their involvement based on what the students, and potentially the PE teachers, need assistance with. The findings provide us with some initial insights into the ways a continuum of support in PE provided by SNAs may be implemented based on student’s different needs and pave the way for some further exploration of the roles of the SNA in PE.

Importance of SNA in PE

On the contrary to the above mentioned potentially negative influences that paraprofessional support can have on students with SEN in PE, this research reported that a substantial 83% of PE Teachers and 92% of SNAs felt that SNAs

had an important role to play in the inclusion of students with SEN during PE class. This was a welcome research finding as it points to a recognition and desire from both SNA's and PE teachers that some students with SEN require additional support to what the PE teacher can provide in order to facilitate inclusion in PE. As mentioned at the beginning of this discussion, analysis of the data indicated that PE teachers with more years of teaching experience perceived the role of the SNA in PE to be more important than PE teachers with fewer years' experience. As alluded to previously this is potentially a positive reflection on the positive experiences which PE teachers have encountered while working with SNAs in PE throughout their years of teaching, leading to them truly valuing their importance or conversely it could be due to older teachers finding it more difficult to include students with SEN into PE and thus relying more heavily on SNAs to assist with such inclusion.

International research supports this finding that para-educators can play an extremely important role in the inclusion of students with SEN into PE (Lieberman, James, & Ludowa 2004; Davis, Oliver, and Piletic 2007; Haegele and Kozub 2010; Maher 2016) but crucially the success of this role in achieving inclusion has been suggested to be dependent on a number of key factors, including training (Lieberman 2007; Maher 2017), collaboration (Vickerman and Blundell 2012), clearly defined roles (Bryan, McCubbin, and van der Mars 2013; French 1999; Lee and Haegle 2016), clear communication of the plan by the PE Teacher (Bryan, McCubbin, and van der Mars 2013; Lee and Haegle 2016; Haegele and Kozub 2010) and involvement in planning and preparation of lessons (Vickerman and Blundell 2012; Haycock and Smith 2011; Haegele and Kozub 2010).

Findings from this research relayed some of the same factors as having an important influence on the role that SNAs play in PE. "Training in inclusion of students with SEN in PE" was selected by 66% of SNAs and 46% of PE teachers to be the factor having the most influence on the role of the SNA in PE. This was followed by "Clearly defined roles of SNAs in PE" with 46% of SNAs and 31% of PE teachers selecting this as the next most important factor.

Training Needs

As indicated above, a major influencing factor on increasing the role of the SNA in PE is that of training in the area of inclusion in PE. This research indicates that just 7% of SNAs had received training in this area and findings from the focus groups echoed the feeling that at times the SNAs felt underprepared for the roles they were fulfilling in PE.

The finding that paraprofessionals are lacking in PE specific training is one which is widespread in international research on paraprofessionals in PE (Smith and Green 2007, Maher 2010; Vickerman and Blundell 2012) with Maher (2014) reporting that 91% of LSAs have not received any PE-specific training. It is evident therefore that training is critical in ensuring children with SEN are supported effectively both by PE teachers and paraprofessionals. As such, research suggests that when training has been made available paraprofessionals have found it beneficial in supporting a more positive and inclusive environment in PE (Slavin et al. 2009; Jerlinder, Danermark, and Peter 2010; Vickerman and Blundell 2012).

Person responsible for delegation of duties:

The findings of this research in relation to who was responsible for the delegation of duties to the SNA in PE was one which showed quite a bit of variance between the perceptions of the SNAs and PE Teachers. SNAs selected the principal as being the main person to delegate such duties (62%) whereas PE Teachers felt they were primarily responsible for delegating duties to the SNA in PE (61%). The differences in selection in this regard were also found to be statistically significant.

Taking this finding into consideration it is perhaps not surprising that needing a “clearly defined role” was seen as being very important for increasing the role of the SNA in PE. A lack of clarity over who is directing the role, undoubtedly at times

must lead to confusion over what the SNA should be doing in PE, and who indeed they should be taking instruction from and reporting to. With research identifying that at times there can be a power disparity between the paraprofessional and PE Teacher (Maher, 2014) and that the attitude of the PE Teacher towards inclusion can have a big impact on the role they delegate to the paraprofessionals (Bryan, McCubbin and Van 2013), the lack of clarity surrounding this responsibility is perhaps a little discerning and requires further research.

The importance of the person responsible for delegating the duties of the SNA in PE was further supported through the findings that there were significant relationships between the person chosen by SNAs and the roles which they selected fulfilling in PE.

Interestingly, when the principal was chosen as being the person responsible for delegating the duties of the SNA, the roles selected by the SNA were merely assisting with preparation and access to the PE class rather than fulfilling any active roles in the PE class. This is worthwhile contemplating considering that the principal was the person most frequently chosen by SNAs as being responsible for delegating duties of the SNA.

Roles fulfilled when SNAs selected the classroom teacher as the main person responsible for the delegation of duties were more likely to report fulfilling roles in PE which involved working collaboratively with the PE teachers, such as assisting teaching class, advising on inclusion and advising on suitable activities while also being likely to select roles which ensured the access to and preparation for the PE class.

Finally, when the SNA chose the student with SEN or the parent of the student with SEN, the roles reported being fulfilled by SNAs in PE was either “no role” or roles of a more active nature such as “assisting in participation”, “assisting/advising the teacher” and “staying to observe the class” .

Essentially what the results seem to be indicating is that when the people responsible for delegating the duties of the SNA in PE have a more direct association with the PE class itself, ie. PE teacher/student/parent, the role of the SNA seems to be somewhat more specific and guided, in that they will assist the participation or not play any role at all, whereas when the principal or resource teacher for example is responsible, the role of the SNA is more general in just ensuring the student can access the class and is prepared for it. Perhaps then there is almost a chain of command in relation to the delegation of the SNAs duties in PE, with the principals and resource teachers being responsible for delegating the broad and general duties which cover the basics of access, care and preparations and if further roles are required of the SNAs, it is the classroom teacher/SNA/student/parent who will guide this increased level of involvement.

Personal characteristics of SNAs and PE teachers

The personality of the SNA and personal interests in sport and physical activity was something which was raised in the focus groups and interviews as having an influence over the roles fulfilled by SNAs in PE. Along with this were considerations surrounding the SNAs physical ability to take an active role in PE. These factors should certainly be taken into account when planning for SNAs roles in PE and as such all duties being asked of SNAs should be carefully discussed with them. Further to this, as alluded to at the beginning of the discussion, it was found that the personal characteristics of SNAs and PE teachers had a significant impact on the roles of SNAs being fulfilled in PE. SNAs who were male were found to be more likely to “assist the class teacher” in PE class than female SNAs while PE teachers who were male were more likely to want SNAs to “advise the PE teacher on suitable activities” for students with SEN in PE. With regards to age of the SNA and the roles they fulfilled, no statistically significant relationship was found but the results showed the PE teachers who were older were more likely to want SNAs to “Assist the student in participation in PE class”.

These factors are all novel findings with regards to the influence they play on the role of the SNA in PE and therefore they provide us with crucial insight into

potential reasons for the variance in the roles of SNAs in PE. The findings also give us knowledge which can help with regards to training and recommendations for the role of the SNA in PE into the future. A key recommendation which would come from this finding in particular would be to value the importance of each individual SNA and PE teachers personal characteristics, personalities, experiences and strengths and weaknesses. Gathering and using all of this information in delegating roles for the SNA in PE will ensure that all staff are comfortable and happy with the roles they are being asked to fulfill and will ultimately result in the best outcomes for students with SEN in PE.

RQ 5: Is there a demand for the provision of training amongst SNAs and PE teachers on including children with SEN in PE?

Lack of training on inclusion in PE

The need for training on inclusion in PE for both the SNA and the PE Teacher was an issue which prevailed throughout the research, and it was evident that the lack of opportunity for such training was hindering inclusion in PE.

Whilst findings of the questionnaire reported that 65% of the PE Teachers had received training in inclusion in PE, primarily through a module in their degree, they stated that more training was needed and that the modules as part of their degree were not given enough time for practical experience. Ample evidence exists in research which supports this finding i.e. PE teacher initial teacher training (Meegan and McPhail, 2006b; Morley et al., 2005) and continued professional development had not adequately provided them with the knowledge, skills or

experience to include students with SEN in PE (Morley et al. 2005; Smith and Green 2004; Vickerman 2002, 2007, Maher 2016).

In line with this, 48% of PE teachers in this study selected that “training on how to include students with SEN” would help to improve inclusion in their PE class and of the 59% of PE Teachers who received training, 96% felt the training was of benefit to them. Unsurprisingly, research has supported the finding that providing quality training on the inclusion of students with SEN in PE for PE teachers, resulted in more positive and supportive attitudes towards inclusive education (Avramadis and Norwich 2002; Jerlinder, Danermark, and Peter 2010). Additionally, students with SEN themselves, in research conducted by Atkinson and Black (2006), believed that their PE experiences would be enhanced if teachers had more training on how to adapt activities.

SNA participants were also asked if they had received any training on inclusion in PE, with a significantly lower number of just 7% of SNAs reporting that they had received such training. The finding that paraprofessionals are lacking in PE specific training is one which is widespread in international research on paraprofessionals in PE (Smith and Green 2007, Maher 2010; Vickerman and Blundell 2012) with Maher (2014) reporting that 91% of LSAs have not received any PE-specific training.

In line with the findings of a lack of training received by SNAs, additional findings from the focus groups and interviews with SNAs expressed the feeling that at times the SNAs felt underprepared for the roles they were fulfilling in PE. It is evident therefore that training is critical in ensuring children with SEN are supported effectively and safely by SNAs. As such, research suggests that when training has been made available paraprofessionals have found it beneficial in supporting a more positive and inclusive environment in PE (Slavin et al. 2009; Jerlinder, Danermark, and Peter 2010; Vickerman and Blundell 2012).

Demand for Training

Encouragingly, almost all PE teachers (98%) and SNAs (96%) confirmed in the questionnaire that they would be interested in undergoing training in inclusion in PE if it was made available to them. Additionally, 94% of SNAs (n=271) stated that such training would enable them to become more active in assisting students with SEN in PE. In relation to the format of such training for PE teachers and SNAs, the most popular option chosen was to run the training as a one day in-school workshop (82% PE teachers and 71% SNAs).

Whilst the particular training needs were not explored any further in the questionnaire, the indication that there is a desire for training, along with the specification of the format which would work best, provides a good initial platform to begin the development of such training. Additional findings from this research, which have been discussed in detail in this chapter, could also act as a substantial evidence base for the contents which should be included in such training for PE teachers and SNAs. Table 1 below outlines how the findings within this research could be converted into components of training on inclusion in PE for PE Teachers and SNAs.

Table 5.1. Proposed contents of inclusion in PE training programme for SNAs and PE teachers based on research findings.

Research Findings	Training Component
Negative attitudes to invisible disabilities	Perceptions of Disability
Individual challenges of SEN/Individual differences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Models of Disability -Understanding Disability -Communication and Etiquette -Continuum of support based on need
Health, Safety and Accessibility	Contraindications to exercise for different types of disability.
Inclusion Confusion in PE	Inclusion Spectrum
PE Curriculum favouring games strand	Adaptation Models for PE Introduction to inclusive activities
Communication of class plan	Collaboration Framework for SNAs and PE teachers Communication techniques for effective collaboration
PE Teacher and SNA relationship	
SNA sharing information about student	

with SEN	
Lack of clearly defined role in PE	Appropriate roles for SNAs in PE (Based on research findings and circular 0030/2014)

In conclusion, the research findings of this study largely indicate that SNAs are currently fulfilling an active role in PE along with a desire to increase this role from both the PE teachers and SNAs perspectives. Troublingly however, the findings also highlight that this role is largely being completed by SNAs without any training in inclusion in PE, and under the guidance of PE teachers who predominantly feel underprepared for inclusion in PE. Positively, the desire to complete training in this area from both SNAs and PE teachers, corresponds with the recognizable need which has been outlined. The valuable insights gained through this research on the factors influencing inclusion in PE, along with those affecting the role of the SNA in PE, have significant potential to allow for the development of a comprehensive training intervention for PE teachers and SNAs. It is recommended that this would be developed and piloted to allow for further development of the role of the SNA in PE.

5.3 Methodological reflections

During the completion of this research study reflections have developed on the priority weighting of the quantitative and qualitative aspects of the data collection and analysis.

This study employed a sequential explanatory mixed methods design and within this design framework, typically, the priority weight is given to the quantitative data collection and analysis. The reasoning for this tends to be because this data collection comes first in the sequence and often represents the major aspect of the mixed-methods data collection process, with the smaller qualitative component following in the second phase of the research (Creswell 2003). However, depending on the study goals, the scope of quantitative and qualitative research questions, and the particular design of each phase, a researcher may give the priority to the qualitative data collection and analysis (Morgan 1998), or assign equally priority to both.

From the beginning of this study it was decided that priority weight would be with the quantitative aspect of the research, through the use of the questionnaire data, because it was felt that this data would lay the foundations of information with regard to the research questions being examined. It was thought that the same level of detail would not have been gained from the qualitative research alone, with regard to being able to outline the types of roles being fulfilled by SNAs, the perceived importance of the roles or the potential factors influencing the roles. Therefore it was determined that the qualitative data would help to explain the quantitative results in a supplementary way. However, as the data was integrated and analysed it became apparent that while the timing of data collection, in relation to collecting the quantitative data first followed by the qualitative data, was a suitable approach to answer the research questions, it was the qualitative data which potentially provided greater insights on the research topic and which certainly provided the depth needed to answer the research questions thoroughly.

It is not uncommon for the weighting of qualitative versus quantitative data to change as a research projects progress, and it has been stated that during mixed methods methodology these decisions can be made at the beginning or amended during or after the study (Creswell 2003). It is also not entirely necessary to give priority weighting to one approach over the other in mixed methods research and in fact the weight can be equally shared by both qualitative and quantitative methods if the study lends itself to this design (Morgan 1998). Furthermore Creswell (2003) has stated that the priority weighting of qualitative over quantitative aspects of the research might depend on the interests of the researcher, their own epistemology and research interests or indeed on the audience reading the study.

Perhaps it could be conceptualised therefore that the reason the qualitative data appeared to make the stronger contribution to knowledge within this research study lies in the way it was presented by the researcher due to their epistemological assumptions and their research experience.

In summary, it is believed that the sequential explanatory mixed methods design remains the best choice as a methodological framework for this research project. However, as the research developed it can be stated that the priority weighting of the quantitative versus the qualitative aspects of the research also developed. True to the nature of mixed methods research, the research questions could not have been answered in full without the contribution of both the quantitative and qualitative data, nonetheless in hindsight the priority weighting did not appear to belong to the quantitative data collected in this research. The interpretation of which data provides greater insight towards the research topic is perhaps relative to the viewpoints of the individual readers of the research. Therefore it can be concluded that there is no dominant status allocated to either the quantitative or qualitative methods in this research but rather they are given equal status and weight and seen to be making an equal contribution to the knowledge gained through the research.

Chapter 6

Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1 Conclusion

In attempting to draw conclusion from the findings presented in this research, the following areas merit particular attention; the impact of the individual nature of SEN, the implementation of the PE curriculum, communication between the SNA and PE teacher around the PE curriculum implementation, issues with inclusion confusion, the SNA as a whole school resource and the active role of the SNA in PE. These areas will be discussed in more detail below.

6.1.1 The individual nature of SEN

Analysis of both the quantitative and qualitative data presented a constant theme surrounding the impact of which SEN types and the individual nature of SEN had on inclusion and the role of the SNA.

In relation to the impact of SEN types, a finding of particular interest was the suggestion by SNAs that teacher's attitudes to SEN were often more negative towards students who had behavioural needs, whereby they regularly doubted whether it was a real disability. A finding which was further supported by statistical analysis of the questionnaire data. This issue of viewing what could be described as "invisible disabilities" less favourably than visible disabilities, such as physical disabilities, is one which has been echoed in existing literature. SNA's and PE teachers reported they predominantly worked with students with "invisible disabilities", therefore the finding above in relation to attitudes to these types of disabilities has the potential to have significant consequences in relation to the influence it could have on the inclusion experiences of students with SEN.

With regard to the individual nature of SEN, it was frequently referred to that the type of SEN, as well as the individual characteristics of the students with SEN, had a major influence on their inclusion and enjoyment in PE, the benefits gained from PE and the role the SNA plays in class. The complexities of prescribing a role for SNAs to be able to cater for such a wide range of needs was one which was alluded to in the discussion and a suggestion was made that this could in part be a

reason for the disparities found in the roles which SNAs fulfilled. In addition to this, it was mentioned that the individual characteristics of students with SEN could at times make it difficult to cater for all needs in one PE class, increasing the need for a flexible approach by the PE Teacher along with differentiation and careful class planning. This finding links well with the topic which follows which summarises the impact of implementation of the PE curriculum and communication of class plans.

6.1.2 Communication of the class plans and implementation of PE curriculum

A key finding on the influencing factors which promote inclusion in PE, along with increasing the role of the SNA in PE, was that of sharing class plans for PE with both the SNA and the students with SEN. It was highlighted in this research that this can play a crucial role in ensuring the safety of SNAs and students, allowing for adequate preparation for the class by both the SNA and the students with SEN and ultimately leading to greater inclusion.

An additional topic which emerged was the SNAs perception that PE teachers needed to adhere to a strict PE “plan” or curriculum. The predominant issue which SNAs had with this appeared to be with the activities associated with the “games” strand of PE, such as soccer and basketball, as these types of activities did not suit the majority of students with SEN with whom the SNAs worked. Interestingly however, findings from the PE Teacher questionnaire highlighted that not all PE curriculum strands were equally implemented and that the “Games” was delivered in far greater frequency than other PE strands. With previous research suggesting that team games and sports are more difficult to include students with SEN into (Maher 2017; Fitzgerald 2005; Smith 2004; Maher 2010b; Waddington 2000), there is room for speculation here that perhaps it is not the need of PE teachers to rigidly stick to a PE curriculum which is causing difficulties with inclusion, as SNAs appeared to perceive, but perhaps the over reliance on the implementation of the games strand in PE which is the issue. The issue with lack of inclusion in PE therefore does not lie within the framework of the PE curriculum (as it is a broad curriculum with 7 strands), rather it lies with how teachers implement the

curriculum in a way that includes or excludes students with SEN, such as an overreliance on the games strand as was found in this research.

Whilst this finding is somewhat beyond the remit of this study, it presents an interesting conundrum for the role of the SNA in PE which makes it have significant relevance. Namely, with another key finding suggesting that SNAs are often required to deliver separate programmes in PE for students with SEN, a question perhaps needs to be asked over whether PE teachers are failing to cater for students of all needs in PE and rather relying on the SNA to deliver more suitable activities to students with SEN while the rest of the PE class takes part in games and team sports. This conclusion leads to the discussion of the next topic which is the issue of inclusion confusion.

6.1.3 Inclusion confusion

As mentioned above it was emphasised in this research that often times the SNAs role in PE was to deliver a separate activity to students with SEN in PE, in small groups or individually. Interestingly the research also indicated that whilst just over half of the participants stated that students with SEN were fully included in PE, the vast majority of them maintained that students with SEN enjoyed the PE class. Through examining both of these findings collectively, it could be implied that students are enjoying PE class which perhaps involves them doing different activities to the majority of their classmates. This may consequently lead PE teachers and SNAs to question whether they are truly included in the class or not. This issue was considered in the discussion and the concept of confusion over what inclusion means was contemplated. Inclusion is nebulous and inclusion for one student with SEN can be completely different for another student with SEN, therefore strategies must be put in place which emphasize the need for different inclusion approaches based on individual students.

The theory of the inclusion spectrum was alluded to in attempting to explain the various “placements” where inclusion can occur within a PE setting, meaning that not all students have to be doing the same thing at the same time to be included. Therefore, while it must be acknowledged that the delivery of separate programmes by SNAs in PE should not be the primary PE setting for students with SEN, there is a place for this type of delivery in cases where it is best suited to the students’ needs. However, it is important to stress that where possible, every effort should be made to include all students together in the same PE class. . An additional area of concern which was raised in relation to separate PE classes for students with SEN was that of the lack of qualifications of SNAs delivering PE. This judgment was echoed in many findings relating to the role of the SNA fulfilling duties beyond their circular remit.

6.1.4 SNA circular v actual duties

Concerns over the SNAs fulfilling roles beyond their circular remit were acutely evident throughout this research. This could be seen in the admission by SNAs that they are aware of playing a number of roles of a pedagogical nature which they were “not supposed to” along with the high number of PE teachers and SNAs selecting duties of a pedagogical nature to describe the current role of the SNA. This research found that there was a high number of students with SEN versus the number of SNAs in schools and suggested that the SNAs often fulfil roles to assist the whole class and the teacher, rather than just the students with SEN to whom they are allocated. In the context of this, it could be speculated that SNAs are filling a role which is needed to facilitate academic learning for students with SEN, due to the lack of other available resources to do so. It is apparent from this finding, along with existing research findings, that the caring nature of the majority of SNAs leads to a willingness to help in whatever way is needed to ensure the inclusion of students with SEN. This consequently has led to an overstressing and diluting of the role they perform that technically is not within their job remit. .

6.1.5 Active Role of SNAs in PE

The novel findings within this research on the role which SNAs currently play in PE were discussed in depth and overall it can be concluded that the role of the SNA in PE is predominately an active role. The findings indicated that currently the principle role played by SNAs in PE was that of *“assisting the participation of students”* with SEN in PE class activities. In addition to this it was found that there was a desire, from both the SNAs and PE teachers, to increase the execution of such a role by SNAs in PE. Furthermore, roles in which the SNA would act as a source of advice on the needs of the students with SEN in PE were also seen to be of importance and as such, PE Teachers and SNAs expressed a desire for such roles to increase. These findings, in collaboration with the finding of SNAs sometimes delivering separate programmes in PE for students with SEN, suggest that there is worthy potential for the development of the role of the SNA in PE to assist in the inclusion of students with SEN. However concern was raised regarding the training needs of SNAs on inclusion in PE, which will be discussed below.

6.1.6 Training needs on inclusion in PE

With the expressed desire for an active role in PE for SNAs, along with the finding that the majority of SNAs are currently fulfilling an active role in PE, the need for adequate training on inclusion in PE is of paramount importance. Results of the questionnaire in this research indicated the ominous lack of training which has been completed by SNAs in PE , while also highlighting the expressed need for further training for PE teacher in the area of inclusion in PE. For health and safety reasons, along with ensuring the best possible inclusion practices and experiences for students with SEN, the provision of training for both SNAs and PE teachers is crucial. On a positive note, the desire for training by SNAs and PE teachers was evident from the results of this research, along with the perception that such training would increase the role of the SNA in PE and assist in inclusion.

6.2 Implications of findings on current inclusive education literature

Whilst this research study had a particular focus on inclusion in PE, and the role of the SNA, many of the conclusions drawn from the findings of this research can inform and support much of the existing literature in the field of inclusive education in general.

Due to the physical nature of PE, the issues which become apparent in this subject in relation to inclusion can often be more obvious and blatant than inclusion experiences in academic subjects. It is for this reason that is important to use the findings of this research to help to understand some of the underlying concerns which may be present in inclusive education in general, and also to consider what the findings may be telling us about inclusion in society.

Three themes in particular which were developed from the research findings in this study can be seen to have distinct relevance to inclusion in education. These themes include “Inclusion confusion”, “The individual nature of SEN” and the “Implementation of the PE curriculum”. The implications of the findings in relation to these themes on the wider inclusion literature will be discussed briefly below.

The theme of inclusion confusion in PE and the individual nature of SEN raised concerns which have been shared by many researchers regarding the debate between integration and inclusion. Fitzgerald (2006) and Smith (2004) for example made observations similar to those in this study whereby the focus in PE tended to be on how to get a student to “fit in” to the PE lesson rather than the other way around. This issue is certainly not unique to PE and has been echoed in the literature which examines inclusion in education in general, with Frederickson and Cline (2002) stating that perhaps ‘there are no children with learning difficulties, only adults with teaching difficulties’ (p.40). While this statement could be taken as somewhat contentious it does provide interesting insight, whereby the focus is shifted away from the disability as being the problem and rather looks towards the

factors in society, or education in this case, as needing to adapt. In conceptualising this theme further, when we move our focus away from disability and look to the broader picture we are more likely to be inclusive rather than merely allowing for integration. Furthermore, refocusing our attention in this way will result in an inclusive environment for all rather than inclusion of just those with SEN.

In exploring available adaptations of the broader picture of PE to allow it to become inclusive the focus should be on differentiating between equality and equity. In other words, all students should not be treated the same but rather all students should get what they need to be successful. Within this, the concept of individual difference and the prominence of the theme of the individual nature of SEN in this study, becomes particularly relevant.

The model of the inclusion spectrum (Black and Williamson 2011), as explored in the introduction chapter, provides an example of a practical application of inclusion which values equity rather than equality. The realization within this research study that a great level of confusion amongst PE teachers and SNAs exists in relation to what inclusion means, both theoretically and practically, is cause for concern and is likely to be mirrored within general education settings. The exploration of this theme and the potential to apply a model such as the inclusion spectrum to inclusive education in general would make a valuable contribution to the inclusive education literature.

In relation to theme of “the implementation of the PE curriculum”, the games dominated culture which was evident in PE within this research, and the negative impact which this had on inclusion, provides some interesting insights on the potential influence of inclusion cultures within schools.

Physical Education is designed to be distinctly separate from “sport”. Sport is defined as ‘formalised physical activity involving competition or challenges against oneself, others or the environment, with an emphasis on winning’ (Government of

Ireland, 1999a, p6) in contrast to PE where the emphasis should be placed on ‘the child’s holistic development, stressing personal and social development, physical growth, and motor development’ (Government of Ireland, 1999a, p6). However, the findings of this research appear to suggest that the games strand, and in particular team sports such as basketball and football, remain the predominant activity being undertaken in PE, despite the vast amounts of literature which suggests that such activities are not conducive to inclusion (Maher 2017; Fitzgerald 2005; Smith 2004).

This competitive and sport dominated discourse within PE has been suggested in the literature as reflecting “support and close alignment to the hegemonic discourses of wider society” (Garrett & Wrench, 2007, p27). What is concerning about this in relation to inclusion in education is that PE, as a subject which is meant to “focus on individual improvement and ‘not on winning or being the best’ (Government of Ireland, 1999a: 6), is in fact sending the message that you do not fit into PE if you cannot compete in team sports. Participation in team sports for those who have not mastered the skills involved in the sport, offers very limited scope for individual improvement and rather celebrates elitism of the students who are sporty and athletic. For inclusion in education to be successful there must be an inclusive culture created in the school which prioritises inclusive values and practices (Ainscow et al. 2006; NCSE 2010). Due to the fact that PE takes place in such an observable social arena, it can be conceptualised that creating an exclusive culture within this subject has the potential to create negative attitudes and perceptions towards inclusion in schools as a whole. Furthermore the concept of elitism through sports in schools could become even more problematic in schools which puts a large emphasis on success of school sports teams and the students who are part of such teams. Therefore when the lines between sport and PE are blurred, as this current research appears to suggest is frequently occurring in schools, there is a danger of creating an exclusive environment not only in the subject of PE but in schools settings as a whole.

The exploration of the themes as outlined above lends the ability for the research findings of this study to make a great contribution to existing inclusive education literature and to bring insights from a new viewpoint. It is important to consider such application of the findings of this research within the broad inclusive education agenda rather than associating it only within the narrow subject area of PE. This will enable the value of the research contribution of this study to increase greatly.

6.3 Recommendations

The following are the recommendations that the researcher suggests in light of the findings which emerged from this research. It is believed that these recommendations would contribute to improvements in the inclusion of students with SEN in PE and also progress the role of the SNA in general education but particularly in PE

- The development and delivery of training on the inclusion of students with SEN in PE aimed at SNAs and PE Teachers. It is recommended that this training would include a focus on perceptions of disabilities and the importance of attitudes towards disabilities, an introduction to inclusion concepts and the inclusion spectrum, adaptation and modification theories and methods, the needs of students with various types of SEN in relation to PE specifically, guidelines on health and safety in PE in particular in relation to the needs of students with SEN.

- Allocation of time by school management for the planning and communication of PE lessons between SNAs and PE Teachers and a directive for the class plans to be shared in advance to allow students and SNAs to prepare adequately.
- Recognition of the pedagogical nature of the SNA role in so far as assisting with learning, adaptation of class activities and monitoring of progress. It is recommended that the DES recognises and acknowledges the broad role of the SNA beyond the current “carer” role and as such that adequate provision be made for this in the circular for SNAs along with training for SNAs to ensure they are equipped to perform these duties.
- The allocation model for SNAs needs to be reconsidered, for reasons which will be discussed below.

The increasing number of students with SEN in mainstream schools, many of whom will not qualify for an SNA but will in fact need their assistance, is putting substantial pressure on the SNAs to meet a large number of student’s needs. The new allocation model for resource teaching hours, whereby schools are allocated a number of SNAs based on the student population as opposed to just on the number of students who qualify for additional teaching hours, would appear to be a more appropriate model for the allocation of SNAs also.

Secondly, the allocation model needs to take greater account for the individual needs of the students to whom they are allocated. For instance, it was alluded to that in many cases students with SEN would need assistance in one subject but not another or in different aspects of completing school activities. Additionally, the circular duties outlined do not take account for the wider variety of individual needs which may apply to individual students to allow them to be included in mainstream education. Greater appreciation for the individual nature of SEN should be considered in relation to the ways in which SNAs are allocated for support so that all students can receive the assistance they need when they need it rather than being allocated support for areas in which they may be able to cope independently.

- Further research is required to examine the particular nature of the potential role of the SNA in PE and how they can help increase the inclusion of students with SEN. Cohorts involved in this research should include SNAs, SENCOs, PE teachers and principals as well as children with SEN. Research on the area of curriculum delivery in PE in Ireland and the potential impact on the inclusion of students with SEN.

Chapter 7

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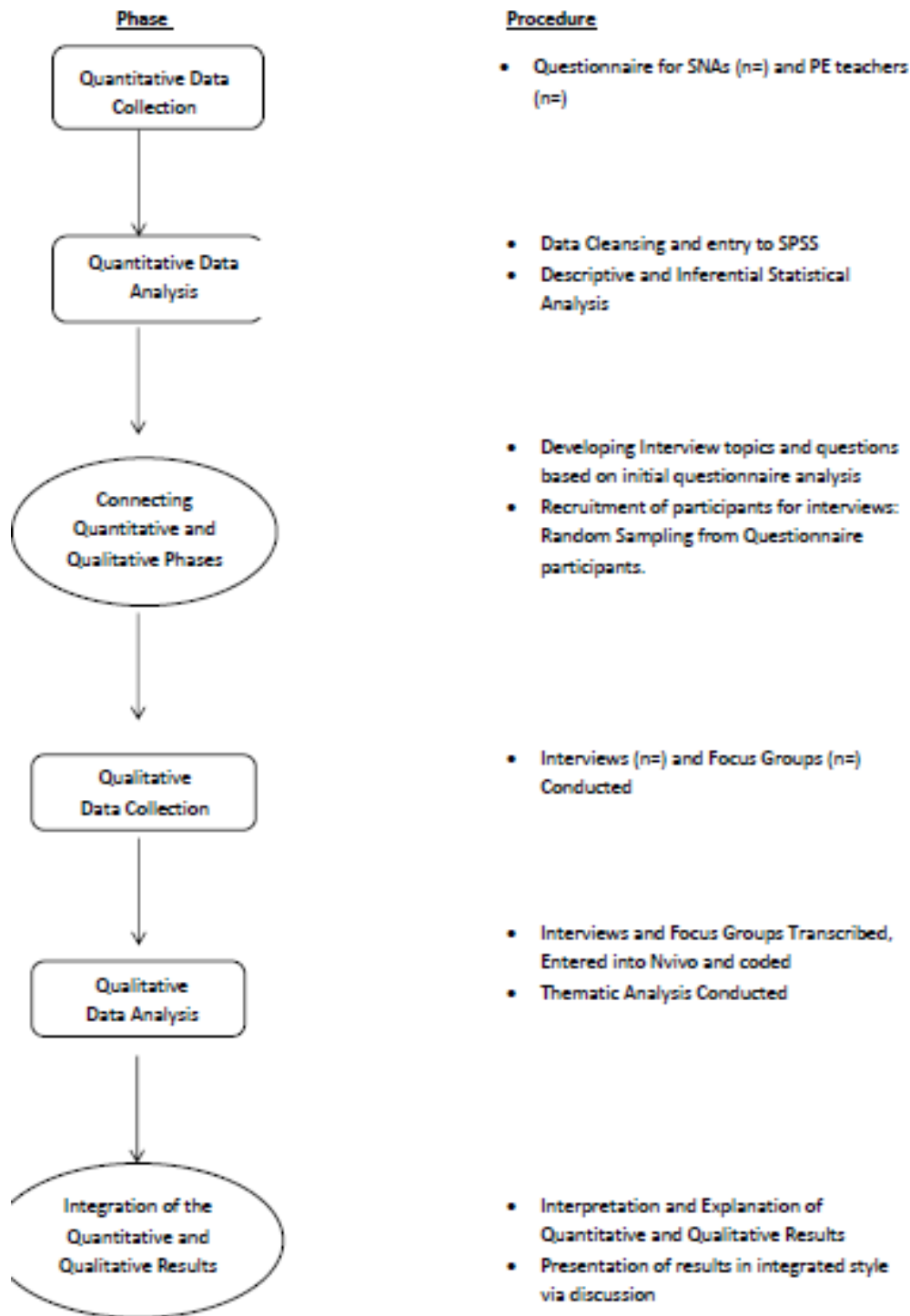
Appendices

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Appendix A

Mixed Methods Model of Data Collection and Data Analysis



Appendix B

Questionnaire for Physical Education Teachers



Please take 10 minutes to complete the following

questionnaire which explores inclusion in Physical Education (PE) and the role of the SNA in PE.

Thank you

Informed Consent Form – Physical Education Teachers

Title: Physical Education for Students with Special Educational Needs

Investigators: This research will examine the physical education (PE) experiences and inclusion of children with special educational needs (SEN) attending mainstream post-primary schools. It will also explore the role that Special Needs Assistants (SNA's) can play in supporting the inclusion of children with SEN into mainstream PE. It will be carried out by Elaine Banville (PhD Student, elaine.banville3@mail.dcu.ie), Dr Sarah Meegan from the School of Health and Human Performance, Dublin City University (contact 01-700680 sarah.meegan@dcu.ie) and Dr. Geraldine Scanlon from the School of Education Studies, Dublin City University (contact 01-7006779 geraldine.scanlon@dcu.ie).

Introduction: Participation in PE has an impact on health throughout one's life. Not all children with SEN have the same opportunities to participate in PE in mainstream schools. This study aims to explore the PE experiences and inclusion of children with SEN attending mainstream secondary schools and to examine the role which SNA's can play in supporting this inclusion in PE. The purpose of the study is to:

Determine the children's experiences of inclusion in PE

Explore how the role of SNA's can help in the inclusion into PE

What you are asked to do as part of this study: You are asked to complete the enclosed questionnaire which will ask you questions surrounding your experiences of inclusion of students with special educational needs (SEN) in PE class, your experiences of the role of the SNA in PE and your perceptions of the role of the SNA to increase inclusion in PE. When you have completed the questionnaire you are asked to return it to the main investigator, Elaine Banville at DCU, in the freepost addressed envelope provided

All information gathered will be treated in the strictest of confidence. To ensure this, your name does not have to be put on the questionnaire and any personal information which is disclosed will

be removed from all data and replaced with an ID number. Only the researchers will know your ID number.

You may withdraw from this study at any point should you choose to do so. There will be no penalty for withdrawing before all stages of the research study have been completed.

I have read and understood the information in this form. The researchers have answered my questions and concerns, and I have a copy of this consent form. To take part in this study please sign the below form and complete the questionnaire which follows. When completed please return to the FREEPOST address given at the back of the questionnaire.

Name in Block Capitals: _____

Signature: _____

Witness: _____

Date: _____

Thank You

Section A **Socio demographic Information**

D.O.B **School Locality:.....**

Gender: **Qualifications:.....**

Is your school a designated DEIS school?

☐ **Yes**

☐ **No**

How many pupils are currently enrolled in your school?

.....

Number of Special Educational Needs (SEN) Students currently enrolled in your school?

.....

Number of SNA's employed in your school?

.....

Have you had experience of teaching students with SEN in your PE class?

.....

If you answered yes to Q5., please indicate the type of Special Educational Needs of the student(s) you have taught

- ☐ **Assessed syndromes (E.g downs syndrome, Prader Willi, Fragile X)**
- ☐ **Autism/Autism spectrum disorder**
- ☐ **Dyspraxia/Developmental co-ordination disorder**
- ☐ **Emotional disturbances/ Behavioural problems (E.g. ADHD)**
- ☐ **General learning disability**
- ☐ **Specific speech and language disorder**
- ☐ **Physical disability**
 - ☐ **Sensory impairment**
- ☐ **Specific learning disability (E.g Dyslexia)**

☐☐☐ **Other: (please specify)**

.....

Section C Roles and Responsibilities of Special Needs Assistants

In this section we are interested in your background and your current school?

In the school you work in who primarily decides the duties and responsibilities of the SNAs in your PE class?

☐ **Principal**

☐ **Classroom teacher/You**

☐ **Student with SEN**

☐ **Parent of student with SEN**

☐ **Resource Teacher**

☐ **SNA**

Other (please specify):

.....

What do you feel is the most important duty of an SNA?

	Most Important	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not very Important	Not at all Important
Assisting class teacher <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Assisting student with SEN <input type="checkbox"/> with clothing, feeding, toileting, hygiene etc	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Assisting student with SEN <input type="checkbox"/> with specific difficulties individual to student	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Assisting in the inclusion of <input type="checkbox"/> students with SEN into class and school setting	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Adapting class activities for <input type="checkbox"/> student with SEN and monitoring individual progress and development	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Advising class teacher as to <input type="checkbox"/> how best to include or adapt activities for student with SEN	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

In your opinion, do you feel that SNA's have an important role to play in the inclusion of students with SEN during PE class?

☐ **Yes**

☐ **No**

From the list below can you identify which best describes the current role of the SNA during your PE class?

- ☐ **No role**

- ☐☐☐ **Drop to and Collect student from class**

- ☐☐ **Assist student in preparing for class**

- ☐☐ **Assist student in accessing class**

- ☐☐ **Stay and Observe class**

- ☐☐ **Assist student in participating in class activities**

- ☐☐ **Assist PE teacher in teaching class**

- ☐☐ **Advise PE teacher on how best to include student in class**

- ☐☐ **Advise PE teacher on activities / exercises suitable for student**

- ☐☐ **Other (please specify):.....**

From the list below can you identify which best describes the role you would like the SNA to have in your PE class?

☐ **No role**

☐ ☐ ☐ **Drop to and Collect student from class**

☐ ☐ **Assist student in preparing for class**

☐ ☐ **Assist student in accessing class**

☐ ☐ **Stay and Observe class**

☐ ☐ **Assist student in participating in class activities**

☐ ☐ **Assist PE teacher in teaching class**

☐ ☐ **Advise PE teacher on how best to include student in class**

☐ ☐ **Advise PE teacher on activities / exercises suitable for student**

☐ ☐ **Other (please specify):.....**

If you would not like the SNA to play a role in PE class, please rate the reasons for this below in order of their importance to you:

	Most Important	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not Very Important	Not Important
No training in PE or such activities <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Not within the specified responsibilities /roles of SNA <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
No collaborative teaching relationship with PE teacher <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Student with SEN does not need SNA in class <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Student with SEN does not want SNA in this class <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

If you would like the SNA to play more of a role in PE class, please select the importance of each of the following factors in allowing them to play more of a role:

	Most Important	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not Very Important	Not Important
Training in how to include students with SEN in PE <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Clearly defined role/responsibility in PE class <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Collaborative teaching relationship with SNA <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Training on collaborative teaching with SNA and PE teacher <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Do you feel students with SEN are fully included in your PE class?

☐ **Yes**

☐ **No**

☐ **Don't know**

☐ **Sometimes**

In your opinion, what are the main beneficial outcomes of PE for students with SEN?

	<i>Most Beneficial</i>	<i>Very Beneficial</i>	<i>Somewhat Beneficial</i>	<i>Not very Beneficial</i>	<i>Not Beneficial</i>
Increasing physical activity levels	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Improving physical fitness	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Improving individual motor skills and activities of daily living	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Increasing time spent socialising and playing games with peers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Taking part in sports and physical activities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Learning new sports and physical activities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
---	--------------------------	--------------------------	--------------------------	--------------------------	--------------------------

Other (please specify):

.....

Do you feel that PE is as important as other academic subjects for students with SEN?

☐ **Yes**

☐ **No**

Additional Comments:.....

Do you believe that students with SEN enjoy your PE class?

☐ **Yes**

☐ **No**

Additional Comments:.....

How many years have you been teaching PE?

.....

How many years have you been working in this current school?

.....

Do you feel you cover all seven of the PE curriculum strands equally in your PE classes?

☐ **Yes (go to Q.12)**

☐ **No (go to Q.11)**

What do you consider to be the most important aim of your PE class?

	Most Important	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not Very Important	Not Important
Preparation for school sports events	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Increase physical fitness	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
social interactions between students	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provide opportunities for participation in a variety of physical activities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Promote life long participation in physical activity	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

If you do not feel you cover all seven strands of the PE curriculum equally in your PE class, please identify which of the following strands you feel you cover most and least frequently:

	Most Frequently	Very Frequently	Somewhat Frequently	Not Very Frequently	Not at all Frequently
Adventure Activities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Athletics	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Aquatics	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Dance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Games	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Gymnastics	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Health Related Activity	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Have you previously received any training on how to include student with SEN in PE?

☐ Yes (go to Q21.)

☐ No (go to Q.22)

If yes please provide details of course:

.....

If Yes, did you feel you benefited from this course?

☐ **Yes**

☐ **No**

If No, do you feel you would benefit from a training course in how best to include students with SEN in PE?

☐ **Yes**

☐ **No**

Would you be willing to take a course on including children with SEN in PE if it was provided for you in your school?

☐ **Yes (go to Q24)**

☐ **No (go to Q.25)**

If you were willing to take a training course, which format would suit best?

- ☐ **1 day in school training**
- ☐ **1 week after school training**
- ☐ **1 evening after school training**
- ☐ **1 evening over a number of weeks training**

If you are not interested in taking a training course, please select your reasons below:

- ☐ **Not enough time**
- ☐ **Not applicable to current teaching position**
- ☐ **Not interested**
- ☐ **Would not be beneficial**

Other, Please specify :

.....

Additional Comments regarding research:

.....

Thank you very much for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.

Sincerely,

Elaine Banville

PhD Candidate in Inclusive Physical Education

Contact: Elaine.banville3@mail.dcu.ie

Please return completed questionnaire to the

Freepost address below using the envelope supplied or your own envelope:

School of Health and Human Performance

Dublin City University

FREEPOST F5060

Dublin 9

A training programme for PE teachers and SNA's of ways to increase inclusion in PE class may be run in conjunction with this research. If you would like to receive more information regarding this, or any other aspects of this research please provide your details below:

Name:

Contact Ph. No:.....

Email Address:

Appendix C

Questionnaire for Special Needs Assistants Teachers



*Please take 10 minutes to complete the following
questionnaire which explores the role of the SNA in PE.*

Thank you

Informed Consent Form – Special Needs Assistants

Title: Physical Education for Students with Special Educational Needs

Investigators: This research will examine the physical education (PE) experiences and inclusion of children with special educational needs (SEN) attending mainstream post-primary schools. It will also explore the role that Special Needs Assistants (SNA's) can play in supporting the inclusion of children with SEN into mainstream PE. It will be carried out by Elaine Banville (PhD Student, elaine.banville3@mail.dcu.ie), Dr Sarah Meegan from the School of Health and Human Performance, Dublin City University (contact 01-7006803 sarah.meegan@dcu.ie) and Dr. Geraldine Scanlon from the School of Education Studies, Dublin City University (contact 01-7006779 geraldine.scanlon@dcu.ie).

Introduction: Participation in PE has an impact on health throughout one's life. Not all children with SEN have the same opportunities to participate in PE in mainstream schools. This study aims to explore the PE experiences and inclusion of children with SEN attending mainstream secondary schools and to examine the role which SNA's can play in supporting this inclusion in PE. The purpose of the study is to:

Determine the children's experiences of inclusion in PE

Explore how the role of SNA's can help in the inclusion into PE

What you are asked to do as part of this study: You are asked to complete the enclosed questionnaire which will ask you questions surrounding your roles and responsibilities as a SNA, in particular in regard to PE class. When you have completed the questionnaire you are asked to return it to the main investigator, Elaine Banville at DCU, in the freepost addressed envelope provided.

All information gathered will be treated in the strictest of confidence. To ensure this, your name does not have to be put on the questionnaire and any personal information which is disclosed will be removed from all data and replaced with an ID number. Only the researchers will know your ID number.

You may withdraw from this study at any point should you choose to do so. There will be no penalty for withdrawing before all stages of the research study have been completed.

I have read and understood the information in this form. The researchers have answered my questions and concerns, and I have a copy of this consent form. To take part in this study please sign the below form and complete the questionnaire which follows. When completed please return to the FREEPOST address given at the back of the questionnaire.

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Witness: _____

Date: _____

Questionnaire for Special Needs Assistants

Section A: In this section we are interested in your background and your current school.

Age:

School Locality:.....

Gender:

Years spent working as SNA.....

Qualifications:.....

Is your school a designated DEIS school?

☐ Yes

☐ No

How many pupils are currently enrolled in your school?

.....

Number of Special Educational Needs (SEN) Students currently enrolled in your school?

.....

Number of SEN Students you work with in current school?

.....

Number of SNA's employed in your school?

.....

How many pupils are currently enrolled in your school?

.....

Number of Special Educational Needs (SEN) Students currently enrolled in your school?

.....

Number of SEN Students you work with in current school?

.....

Number of SNA's employed in your school?

.....

How many of these SNA's are employed full-time?

.....

Please indicate the type of Special Educational Need (s) of the student (s) you work with in your current school:

- ☐ **Assessed syndromes (E.g downs syndrome, Prader Willi, Fragile X)**
 - ☐ **Autism/Autism spectrum disorder**
 - ☐ **Dyspraxia/Developmental co-ordination disorder**
 - ☐ **Emotional disturbances/ Behavioural problems (E.g.ADHD)**
 - ☐ **General learning disability**
- ☐ **Specific speech and language disorder**
- ☐ **Physical disability**
- ☐ **Sensory impairment**
- ☐ **Specific learning disability (E.g Dyslexia)**

Other: (please specify)

Section B Roles and Responsibilities

In your current role as SNA, who primarily decides the duties and responsibilities you have towards the student(s) with SEN requiring your assistance:

- ☐ **Principal**
- ☐ **Classroom teacher**
- ☐ **Student with SEN**
- ☐ **Parent of student with SEN**
- ☐ **You**
- ☐ **Resource Teacher**

Other (please specify):

Please rate the following duties based on what you feel is *most important* and *least important* in your role as an SNA:

	Most Important	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not very Important	Not at all Important
Assisting class teacher <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Assisting student with SEN <input type="checkbox"/> with clothing, feeding, toileting, hygiene etc	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Assisting student with SEN <input type="checkbox"/> with specific difficulties individual to student	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Assisting in the inclusion of <input type="checkbox"/> students with SEN into class and school setting	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Adapting class activities for <input type="checkbox"/> students with SEN and monitoring individual progress and development	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Advising class teacher as to <input type="checkbox"/> how best to include or adapt activities for student with SEN	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

In your role as SNA do you assist in the development of Individual Education Plans (IEPs) for your assigned pupil(s)?

☐ **Yes**

☐ **No**

Section C Special Needs Assistants and Physical Education

In your role as SNA do you assist in the development of IEPs for Physical Education (PE) for your assigned pupil (s)?

☐ **Yes**

☐ **No**

In your opinion, do you feel that SNA's have an important role to play in the inclusion of children with SEN during PE class?

☐ **Yes**

☐ **No**

From the list below can you identify which best describes your current role, with your assigned SEN student (s), in PE class?

- ☐ **No role**
- ☐ **Drop to and Collect student from class**
- ☐ **Assist student in preparing for class**
- ☐ **Assist student in accessing class**
- ☐ **Stay and Observe class**
- ☐ **Assist student in participating in class activities**
- ☐ **Assist PE teacher in teaching class**
- ☐ **Advise PE teacher on how best to include student in class**
- ☐ **Advise PE teacher on activities / exercises suitable for student**
- ☐ **Other (please specify):.....**

From the list below can you identify which best describes the role you would like to have, with your assigned SEN student(s), in PE class?

- ☐ **No Role (please go to Q15)**
- ☐ **Drop to and Collect student from class (please go to Q15)**
- ☐ **Assist student in preparing for class**
- ☐ **Assist student in accessing class**
- ☐ **Stay and Observe class**
- ☐ **Assist student in participating in class activities**
- ☐ **Assist PE teacher in teaching class**
- ☐ **Advise PE teacher on how best to include student in class**
- ☐ **Advise PE teacher on activities / exercises suitable for student**
- ☐ **Other (please specify):**

.....

If you would not like to play a role in PE class, please rate the reasons for this below in order of their importance to you

	Most Important	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not Very Important	Not Important
Time to take a break <input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
No training in PE or such activities <input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Not within your specified responsibilities /roles as SNA <input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
No collaborative teaching relationship with PE teacher <input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Student with SEN does not need you <input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Student with SEN does not want you in this class <input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Other (Please Specify)

If you would like more of a role in PE class, please select the importance of each of the following factors in allowing you to play more of a role:

	Most Important	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not Very Important	Not Important
Training in how <input type="checkbox"/> to include students with SEN in PE		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Clearly defined <input type="checkbox"/> role/responsibility in PE class		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Collaborative <input type="checkbox"/> teaching relationship with PE teacher		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Training on how <input type="checkbox"/> best to work as a Co Teacher in PE Class		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Other.....

Do you feel PE is a crucial part of the curriculum in Post primary Schools?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Do you feel that PE is as important as other academic subjects for students with SEN?

☐ **Yes**

☐ **No**

Do you believe that the students with SEN who receive your assistance enjoy PE?

☐ **Yes**

☐ **No**

What do you feel are the most beneficial outcomes of PE for students with SEN?

	<i>Most Beneficial</i>	<i>Very Beneficial</i>	<i>Somewhat Beneficial</i>	<i>Not very Beneficial</i>	<i>Not Beneficial</i>
Improving physical fitness <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Improving individual motor skills and activities of daily living <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Increasing time spent socialising and playing games with peers <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Taking part in sports and physical activities <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Learning new sports and physical activities <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Other (please specify):.....

Do you feel the students with SEN who require your assistance are fully included in PE class?

☐ **Yes**

☐ **No**

☐ **Don't know**

☐ **Sometimes**

Have you previously received any training on how to include student with SEN in PE?

☐ **Yes (go to Q.23)**

☐ **No (go to Q.24)**

If yes please provide details of course:

.....

If Yes, did you feel you benefited from this course?

☐ **Yes**

☐ **No**

If No, do you feel you would benefit from a training course in how best to include students with SEN in PE?

☐ **Yes**

☐ **No**

Would you be willing to take a course on including children with SEN in PE if it was provided for you in your school?

☐ **Yes (go to Q26)**

☐ **No (go to Q.27)**

If you were willing to take a training course, which format would suit best?

☐ **1 day in school training**

☐ **1 week after school training**

☐ **1 evening after school training**

☐ **1 evening over a number of weeks training**

If you are not interested in taking a training course, please select your reasons below:

☐ **Not enough time**

☐ **Not applicable to current roles/responsibilities**

☐ **Not interested**

☐ **Would not be beneficial**

Other, Please specify :

.....

If you underwent training such as that above do you feel you would play a more active role in assisting the students with SEN in PE class?

☐ **Yes**

☐ **No**

Thank you very much for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.

Sincerely,

Elaine Banville

PhD Candidate in Inclusive Physical Education

Contact: Elaine.banville3@mail.dcu.ie

Please return completed questionnaire to the Freepost address below using the envelope supplied or your own envelope:

School of Health and Human Performance

Dublin City University

FREEPOST F5060

Dublin 9

A training programme for PE teachers and SNA's of ways to increase inclusion in PE class may be run in conjunction with this research. If you would like to receive more information regarding this, or any other aspects of this research please provide your details below:

Name:

Contact Ph. No:.....

Email Address:

Appendix D

**6-item modified validity rating form- Questionnaire Feedback* Adapted from
Thomas and Nelson (1996)**

Please take a moment to rate the questionnaire you completed to provide crucial feedback on the usability of the questionnaire for further research

Evaluation Scale:

(5) Strongly Agree (4) Agree (3) Undecided (2) Disagree (1) Strongly Disagree

1. The questionnaire was clear and concise

5 4 3 2 1

2. The questionnaire contained appropriate terminology

5 4 3 2 1

3. The questionnaire was easy to follow

5 4 3 2 1

4. The questionnaire was not wordy or lengthy

5 4 3 2 1

5. The questionnaire was not biased

5 4 3 2 1

6. The questionnaire had clear instructions

5 4 3 2 1

Do you have any other comments or feedback on the questionnaire?

Appendix E

NCSE 14/15 Resource Allocation by County

NCSE 14/15 Resource Allocation by County

County	Primary				Post Primary			
	SNA Posts in September 2014	SNA Posts for October 2014	RT Hours in September 2014	RT Hours for October 2014	SNA Posts in September 2014	SNA Posts from October 2014	RT Hours for September 2014	RT Hours from October 2014
Carlow	71.59	73.58	882.30	987.70	29.50	29.00	682.35	709.93
Cavan	90.17	89.17	990.25	1,075.68	21.50	21.50	683.77	741.27
Clare	143.13	142.63	2,585.70	2,692.80	45.50	45.50	1,217.05	1,246.38
Cork	943.91	945.98	12,595.05	13,426.35	278.00	277.00	7,910.93	8,274.43
Donegal	322.52	326.88	2,909.55	3,105.90	149.50	150.50	2,622.13	2,619.58
Dublin	1,749.53	1,748.95	18,237.80	19,617.58	616.50	614.00	13,661.76	14,143.43
Galway	397.55	395.05	6,561.15	6,961.50	140.50	138.00	3,047.05	3,211.93
Kerry	215.29	217.04	3,091.03	3,310.33	74.50	72.50	2,258.26	2,326.37
Kildare	316.88	318.04	3,460.35	3,700.05	84.75	84.75	2,644.94	2,721.01
Kilkenny	93.43	94.10	1,178.53	1,257.58	34.00	34.00	836.15	885.45
Laois	114.72	114.72	1,382.95	1,470.93	23.00	23.00	869.73	894.80
Leitrim	41.05	41.05	433.93	476.85	15.50	15.50	357.06	367.69
Limerick	231.46	229.13	4,907.39	5,226.14	69.50	69.25	2,961.10	3,009.55
Longford	49.38	49.38	706.35	754.80	18.25	18.25	488.48	519.50
Louth	169.17	171.50	1,574.63	1,708.50	56.25	56.25	1,568.55	1,615.25
Mayo	137.03	138.53	2,272.05	2,456.93	54.75	54.75	1,470.93	1,468.70
Meath	221.71	221.71	2,753.58	2,973.73	69.00	69.00	1,561.43	1,613.16
Monaghan	74.55	74.88	915.45	1,000.88	29.00	29.00	688.03	705.45
Offaly	124.81	123.81	1,688.95	1,817.73	27.25	27.25	1,012.70	1,022.48
Roscommon	98.09	100.25	1,619.68	1,760.35	22.50	22.50	585.90	579.10
Sligo	66.38	66.13	771.38	868.70	18.00	17.00	717.18	753.30
Tipperary	202.87	201.62	3,034.08	3,353.25	75.50	75.50	2,009.33	2,074.78
Waterford	157.84	158.50	1,483.68	1,595.45	67.25	67.25	1,317.88	1,234.15
Westmeath	134.15	133.32	1,787.55	1,879.78	39.00	40.00	1,109.05	1,179.17
Wexford	211.75	211.25	2,692.80	2,885.33	76.75	77.75	2,179.05	2,211.35
Wicklow	162.91	163.24	2,363.40	2,601.43	49.25	49.25	1,940.45	2,063.28
	6,541.87	6,550.24	82,879.31	88,966.19	2,185.00	2,178.25	56,401.17	58,191.43

Appendix F

Guide Topics/questions for Interviews and Focus Groups with SNA

Background Context to school

1. Can you tell me about the students you work with?
 - i. -How many students and what types of needs do they have?
2. How many SNAs in the school?
3. How many students with SEN in the school?

Roles and Responsibilities of SNA

4. Could you talk me through a typical day in work?
5. What are the most enjoyable/challenging aspects associated with the job?
6. What do you believe to be the main roles & responsibilities of an SNA?
7. How do u feel about these roles.....
 - i. -Are they in line with your expectations/ dept education expectations?

8. What kind of relationship do you have with the students you work with?

- i. -i.e teacher/student relationship, friendship, mother/child relationship, carer/patient relationship?

Inclusion

9. What is your understanding of the term inclusion?

10. What do you feel are the pros and cons of students with SEN being included in mainstream schools?

11. Could u talk to me about the inclusion of students with sen in the school you work with:
- do u feel they are included in class activities and the school environment
-can u provide any such examples

12. How much of this do you feel is due to your work or the support of the SNA in general?

13. Do the students ever express to you their feelings on whether they are included?

Inclusion in PE

14. Does your student attend pe class with his/her peers?

15. Do you feel that students with SEN are well included in PE in your school?

i. -Can you give me examples of times when they were/were not included?

16. Do you feel the pe teacher is capable of adapting PE class to ensure your student is included?

17. Do you feel the student would benefit from having a trained SNA in the class to help in adapting activities etc.?

18. Do you feel PE class is beneficial to your student and can you provide any examples of such?

Role of SNA in PE

19. What role do you currently play in PE class?

i. -Why that role?

-Would you like more/less of a role?

20. Do you believe your role has/could have an impact on the students' inclusion in PE?

21. What kind of an Impact do you feel you could have on increasing the inclusion of students with SEN in pe?

i. -what type of things do you feel you could help with

ii. -would it be helpful for the pe teacher?

iii. -would the student with SEN be happy to have you in the class?

22. Have you received any information e.g from SEN co-ordinator or the PE teacher on what your role in PE?

i. -Do you feel you have input into defining your specific role within PE

23. Do you feel that the role of the SNA in PE differs dependant on the type of SEN you work with?

24. Do you feel the role of the SNA in PE is the same as in other subjects?

Training within PE:

25. Have you ever experienced any training within the area of inclusion in Physical Education?

i. -If not, would you feel a training programme would be beneficial?

26. -Would you like to take part in training?

27. What areas would you like to see covered on such a training course?

28. Do you feel it would be beneficial for the PE teacher to attend the same training?

AOB

Do you have any other information you would like to add in relation to this research?

Appendix G

Letter of Ethical approval for research project

Ollscoil Chathair Bhaile Átha Cliath
Dublin City University



Ms. Elaine Banville
School of Health and Human Performance

25th January 2013

REC Reference: DCUREC/2012/238

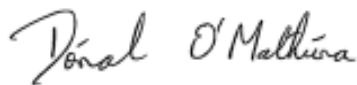
Proposal Title: **Physical Education for ~~Student~~ with Special Educational Needs**

Applicants: Ms. Elaine Banville, Dr. Sarah Meegan, Dr. Geraldine Scanlon

Dear Elaine,

Further to expedited review, the DCU Research Ethics Committee approves this research proposal. Materials used to recruit participants should note that ethical approval for this project has been obtained from the Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee. Should substantial modifications to the research protocol be required at a later stage, a further submission should be made to the REC.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Donal O'Mathuna'.

Dr. Donal O'Mathuna
Chairperson
DCU Research Ethics Committee



Taighde & Nuálaíocht Tacalocht
Ollscoil Chathair Bhaile Átha Cliath,
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